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NED M^cCOOL

AND HIS

FOSTER BROTHER.



AN IRISH TALE,

FOUNDED ON FACTS.



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FOSTER BROTHER.

AN IRISH TALE,

Founded on Facts. By SAMOTH, author of "Strabane and Lifford," "The Consequences of a Refusal," &c.

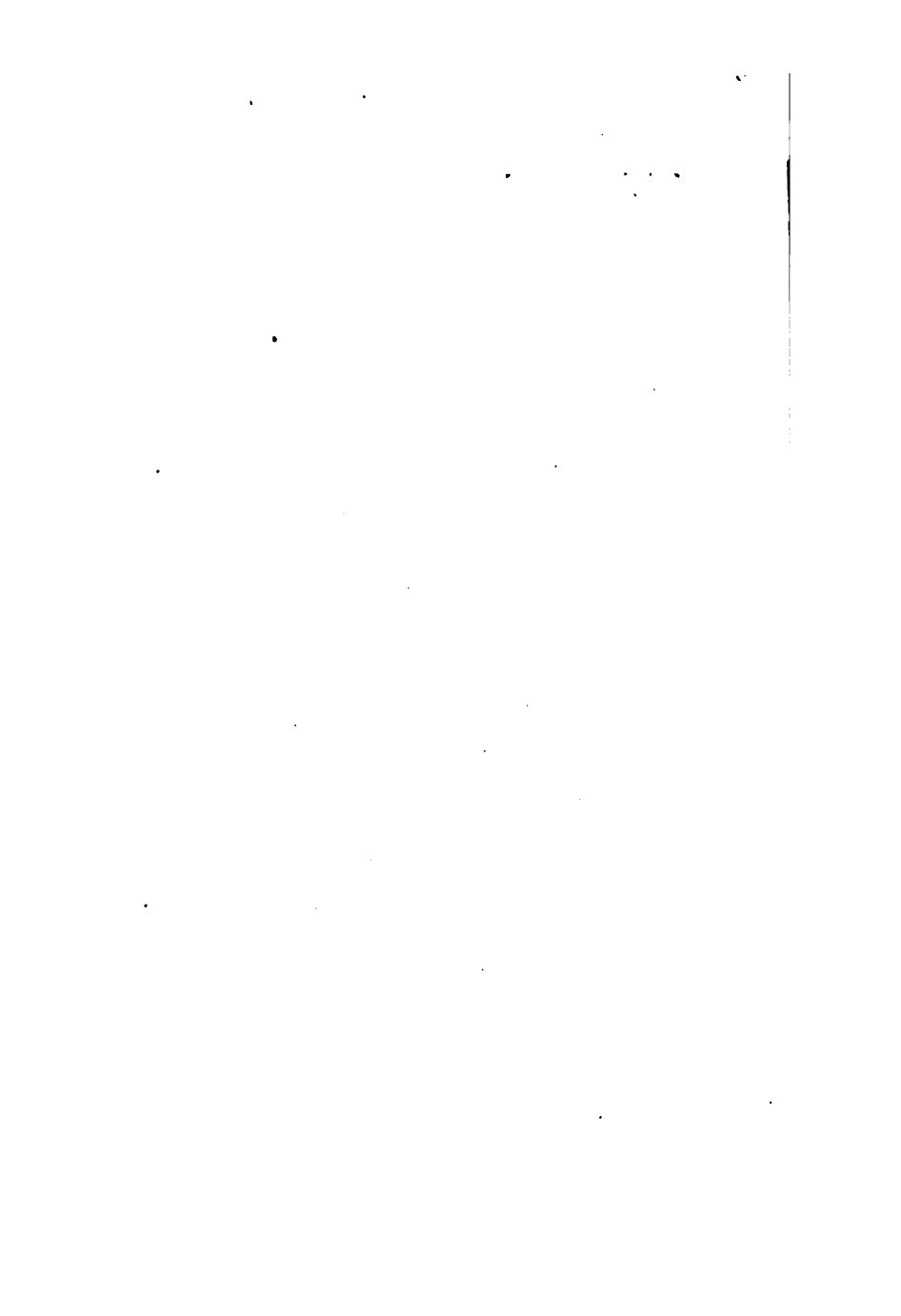


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1871.

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TO
VERE FOSTER,
THE UNTIRING PROMOTER OF EDUCATION,
AND THE
BELOVED AND TRUSTED FRIEND
OF THE
IRISH NATIONAL TEACHERS,
THIS BOOK,
With Warm Affection & Grateful Respect,
IS DEDICATED,
BY
THE AUTHOR

CASTLEFIN, NOVEMBER, 1871.

P R E F A C E .

To redeem from oblivion some of our local incidents was my reason for writing "NED M'COOL." My characters are not all imaginary, though many of them are hidden. To weave my true characters and true incidents into a connected tale necessitated a little fiction, and only a little is given.

To the critics I would say, be merciful, and to my readers, be many.

SAMOTH.

Castlefin, November, 1871.

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NED MCCOOL

AND HIS

FOSTER BROTHER.

CHAPTER I.

Has who would attempt to prove that love is not the great private mobile of nearly all human actions, would encounter many difficulties in the undertaking. For, whether it were a Rothschild, a Wallington, or a Napoleon, panting for the finale at Waterloo, each was equally prompted by love; the first of money, the others of fame and victory. From Nisired to Disraeli, human nature has ever been elevated or demoralised by the master passion, not indeed always known as Love; yet love all the same. Love of parents, love of fame, love of revenge, love of wealth, love of power, love of a fellow mortal—are these not the promptings that originate and accomplish all merely worldly actions? And looking at heavenly affairs, does not love of God, love of good, love of virtue, love of religion, or philanthropic love, perform wonders in all parts of our globe? What causes high-born men to leave their father's castles and the affluence they find there, to wander among the poor Indian, the ignorant Malay, or the jealous Chinese? What, but charity. And what is charity but love of God and our neighbour. And this miserable old pauper that begs his bread among men almost as poor as himself—what is it that feeds him, and clothes him, and gives him a roof-tree to shelter his weary limbs when storm

or night necessitates safety or repose? What, but charity. Whether an Alexander or a Caesar, a Hannibal or a Napoleon; a Xavier, a Columbus, a Mahomet, a Cromwell, a Tamerlane, an O'Connell, or an Ignatius; all are influenced by this sympathetic, this omnipotent impulse, known as love.

For what was the ambition of an Alexander but love of power, or conquest, or fame? What is anger but love of revenge, as with Cain? Patriotism, but love of country, as with Tell, Wallace, or Washington? Charity, but love of God and our neighbour, as with a Sales or an Augustine? And so on.

Whether it were any such feeling that caused the incidents this story of mine, dear reader, records, will be better known and believed when we shall have read the chapters that compose my tale.

The family of the Darcuses had dwelt from time immemorial in their fine old residence of Heather Hall, which was situated in one of the Irish north-western counties. At the base of Croghy Hill, round which wound the pretty meandering Avon-buoy, by whose banks dwelt a class of peaceful farmers, tenants of the Darcuses, sat Heather Hall, sweetly embosomed by elm, oak, and the less tall but more beautiful rhododendron. The word "sat" is here used instead of the more usual term "stood," as it conveys a truer idea of the long, broad, low style of buildings that composed Heather Hall. The present proprietor, Sir James Darcus, had often intended to raise his residence into the castle order, that it might overshadow the surrounding habitations, even as he himself wished to overawe the inhabitants by his unequalled importance and prestige. There was one joy of his heart unfulfilled; and until that boon were gained, Heather Hall should remain as he received it from his worthy father. Sir James was in love. Start not, reader mine. Wonder not, but read on. I repeat it, Sir James was in love. Love of what? Ay "there's the rub." Love of Miss Purseproud? You missed it. Love of Lady Flora Prideofkin? Missed it again. What was it then? What was the object of Sir James's fancy that, ungained, caused Heather Hall to remain so long under his

ownership in its present position? We shall see as the story proceeds.

Wealthy, haughty, and vain, as Sir James was, it needs scarcely be said that he was no favourite, either among the peasantry or aristocracy; for, from the former his selfishness brooked no neglect, and with the latter his vanity unwillingly permitted an equality. Living greatly secluded from social intercourse by the very nature of his disposition, he devoted himself to the improvement of his large estates, which he had brought to an uncommonly high state of cultivation, but which were let at enormously high rents. As he personally superintended the tenants' tillage, and never perpetrated what he denominated the "mad foolishness" of granting leases, he was able to veto what he disliked; and ever gave the option to any refractory tenant, of yielding obedience to his wishes or an instant removal from his property. "The world is wide; you can find a farm some other where"—such was his invariable reply to the few who dared argue against his commands. He was even known to proceed to the extreme of compelling the potatoes in a newly-planted plot of ground to be lifted, that the land might remain in lea, in accordance with the fiat he had issued.*

It may now be imagined how little the tenants on the Darcus estates dare aspire to a level with their landlord, and with what scarifying contemptuousness they were met did they attempt such a dangerous ascent.

Yet there was an exception to this condition of things, and one, too, which Sir James, haughty and exclusive as he was, could neither trammel nor remove.

Years or centuries before, a tenant named Santley had saved the life of one of Sir James's ancestors, Sir Joshua Darcus; and the grateful Baronet rewarded the saviour of his life by giving him a deed for ever of the farm he then held at only a few shillings a year. The farm was a good one; the Santleys were good farmers; and the result was, that in Sir James's time they were reputed to be as wealthy almost as the Baronet himself.

* A fact.

Be this as it may, however, certain it is that young Hubert Santley rode as fine horses and drove as fine a team as Sir James; and many a time when the latter thought that the prize was all his own, Hubert would glide past him, be in at the death, and seize the prize so nearly in his grasp. Often did the Baronet feel itching to inflict corporal punishment on Hubert's shoulders for so daring him, but something in the young man's eye quailed him, and he always postponed the retaliation till a more fitting opportunity would present itself. When that would offer, though, how he would revel in the enjoyment, but meantime he must curb his feelings as best he might.

And here, again, Sir James was in love—love of revenge.

Our wealthy Baronet was not always so merose and severe; the time was when his genial disposition and social habits endeared him to all who associated with him, and made him also loved and admired by those whose positions were far inferior to his. This unpleasant change was caused by the death of his wife, a lady in every sense of the word. Sir James, like many another, wished for a son and heir. Disappointed in his first child, which was a daughter, he yet hoped to have a son to enjoy his estates, and that object he loved. But when Lady Darcus was called away to another world, leaving her little daughter scarcely two years old, her husband gradually grew haughtier and gloomier, devoting much of his time and attention to the superintending of his little heiress's education, watchful of her progress, proud of her beauty, and a gratified slave to her childish, wayward caprices and inclinations.

Nor did the little Annie grow up without some of her parent's pride and exclusive notions pervading her actions; on the contrary, she was more wayward, more uncertain, poulder in her girlish way; but more, infinitely more, charitable, kinder, homelier, than her parent had ever been.

There was one point on which her father and she differed; but it was one in which not all his persuasions, nor even his injunctions, could prevent her having her own way. It was associating with Hubert Santley. Sir James had wrought upon family pride, and riches, and title, and position, to win her from the habit she

had of being with Hubert, but in vain. Saucily would she turn up her little lips, and ask him: "Are you afraid, papa, I shall ask him to be my husband?" Her papa was severe, there is no doubt of that; but he was wise enough to know that compulsion with a girl like his daughter would only rivet more tightly the bonds he wished to break, or create notions he hoped had no existence save in his own fears.

And so Annie Darcus grew up into the freshness of young womanhood, beautiful with a peculiar sort of beauty, and innately proud with a laudable species of haughtiness. Her beauty consisted more of the expression and general appearance that compelled respect, while deepening into admiration as length of acquaintance opened more sociably the qualities adorning the mind. She was one of the few whose countenances gain from the true mental reflex shown thereon. Keen and steady in her perceptions, her friendship, much less her affection, was never given to one whose mind was not imbued with nature's true teachings. A vein of deep satire pervaded her conversation with those whose egotism, pedantry, vanity, or arrogance excited her mirth. Her character, however, will be better known as the story proceeds.

A beautiful day in October. The huntsmen had gathered in all their strength, making the field the finest of the season. Many ladies followed the hounds on the occasion, and none among them rode a statelier seat nor a statelier steed than Annie Darcus. Her horse was truly a gallant beast, black as jet, as fiery and yet as docile as a barb.

The fox was unearthed on the brow of Croghry Hill, just a little above Sir James's residence. Away he gallantly led, and as boldly followed his pursuers. Away and away, ditch nor fence proving an obstacle to cunning Reynard or the well-mounted riders.

Suddenly a cry echoes through the chase.

"The river! The river!"

So it was. The fox was seen making for the Avonbuoy, with the hounds in full cry at his tail, the riders following down the hill. Only two horses attempt the river; Lightning, ridden by

Miss Darcus, and Revenge, guided by the steady hand of Hubert Santley. The other riders swerved away to the right towards a bridge that spanned the river about a mile distant. As Miss Darcus sped across the meadows bordering the water's edge, she was addressed by her companion.

"I trust your horse swims well, Miss Darcus?"

"I do not know, indeed; papa has him these months past, but I believe we have never tried him in the water yet."

As the lady replied, the river was reached, and into it plunged the two horses at the same instant that the hounds emerged from it on the other bank. Hubert kept his eye steadily fixed on his companion, and soon perceived that her hunter was uneasy. The uneasiness increased; and Lightning soon succeeded in casting his rider, and immediately afterwards struck for the shore he had left. Hubert foresaw the danger, and had made preparations to meet it. He had already turned Revenge's head in Miss Darcus's direction, and though the current was here pretty strong, but a minute or so elapsed until the now senseless lady was on the saddle before him. To gain the bank they were seeking occupied but a few seconds. Hubert was not only a thoroughly sensible fellow, but also ready of invention, and soon enjoyed the happiness of seeing the lady recovered from her insensibility.

Not more than a hundred perches from the bank where Hubert and Miss Darcus alighted, were the wine-cellars of a clergyman's mansion, which itself stood convenient on a rising mound overlooking the river, and adjoining which was a pretty cottage of the gardener, who was also the porter. To this cottage Hubert now led his companion, who was already greatly recovered from her accident, and beginning to regain her colour and composure. A good fire assisted in restoring her to her usual state; while Hubert, meantime, strolled down towards the river for Revenge. Noticing Reynard's tracks, he turned to follow them, and found himself conducted towards the dilapidated wine-cellars. And dilapidated they were, their doors lying open and broken; the windows unclosed and unbarred, and the walls and roofs rent and torn in many places. Into one of the compartments Hubert

tracked Reynard; and there, panting and exhausted in one of the corners, the thievish animal was captured alive by our young farmer, just as the hounds, which had partly lost the scent, and been partly called after the huntsmen, came on the spot, accompanied close at their heels by the riders.

Sir James Darcus was actually quivering with suppressed passion, at not only losing the fox, but at its being taken alive, and particularly by Hubert Santley. A disagreeable *recontre* was evident, but was fortunately prevented by the opportune approach of Miss Darcus, whose presence compelled her haughty parent to curb his wrath as best he could. He was assisted in this by noticing the yet somewhat disordered appearance of his daughter.

"Why, Annie, how is this?" enquired he, as she came sufficiently close to him, so that he noticed her unusually pale cheeks and ruffled hair.

"Lightning threw me when crossing the Avonbuoy, papa," she answered, "and but for Mr. Santley I would now be lying in the water;" and her voice yet quivered as she thought of her narrow escape from the fangs of death; and her eye gleamed with thankfulness as she glanced in heartfelt gratefulness at Hubert. Her father turned to her preserver.

"I thank you, Santley. From my heart and soul I thank you;" and fervent and firm was the grasp with which he caught Hubert's hand. His heart was touched, for his daughter was his most vulnerable part, and his heart prompted the thanks his lips uttered. With no less warmth did Hubert return the grasp, but he uttered no reply, knowing in his heart that the baronet's gratitude was but a fleeting effusion.

"Remember, Sir James," Hubert answered, "that Miss Darcus is still in her wet clothes, and may, in consequence, receive injuries from them, while we are losing time. Would it not be well, then, to procure a carriage for the ride to Heather Hall? With your permission, I'll ride up to the rector's and get one of his carriages; and may I suggest that, in the meantime, Miss Darcus ought to remain near the fire, and get some nourishing drink too."

He accompanied this last sentence by a hurried yet beseeching glance towards the lady, and was gratified to see she understood him, while, at the same time, he felt she appreciated his intentions at their proper worth. Without waiting for affirmation or negation from Sir James, he leaped on Revenge, and rode swiftly away; for, though the rector's mansion stood, as has been said, only a few perches from the gardener's cottage, in a direct line, yet by the road, or the way Hubert would have to bring the carriage, it was fully a mile off.

Hubert's departure seemed to be the signal for others of the huntsmen to depart also; so, after the usual common-place expressions of condolence and hope to Miss Darcus and her father on her late accident, all gradually withdrew until none remained, save a neighbouring baronet, Sir Alexander Edwards, and the servants.

If the leading trait in the character of Sir James Darcus was haughtiness, that of cowardice was predominant in the breast of Sir Alexander Edwards. If the former's tyranny towards his inferiors resulted from a feeling of fancied superiority or intolerable arrogance, the latter's sprang from a ferocious sense of power, or a paltry wish to display authority. If the one was hateful for his pride, the other was equally so for his poltroonery. Sir James bore with the falling of his brother baronet for some reason which had never become public, though the association of two so dissimilar characters gave rise to many a surmise of why the acquaintance was so lengthened, and it was shrewdly conjectured that Sir Alexander had ulterior purposes in view than any easily apparent.

On more occasions than one, prior to the evening on which the fox-hunt occurred, as mentioned above, and which is the first of the incidents that compose this tale, the two baronets had had many private interviews; and now, having seen Miss Darcus comfortably fixed in the gardener's cottage, they went out, and were soon arm-in-arm engaged in what was evidently an interesting and exciting conversation.

"But I assure you, Sir James," the other was saying, "I make no unwarranted assertion. I would pledge my life that

that Santley is caught by your daughter's charms. I kept my eye on him while she was present, and I am certain I am right. And then, look at his volunteering to ride away to procure a vehicle to convey her home rather than that she should risk any harm riding home in the saddle."

"And am I to understand, Sir Alexander, that you can fault every one who shows any attentive kindness to my daughter?" asked Sir James, with some asperity in his voice, his choler rising.

"Most unquestionably not. But my dear Darcus," continued Sir Alexander, perceiving the mistake he had made, and hastening to pacify his companion, "do you not perceive the impropriety of a young man's proffering advice and assistance, when you—her father, and I—an old friend of your family, are present. To me, such boldness—and from a mere farmer too!—savours of impertinence. Hence my wonder that either you or Miss Darcus accepted his offers, if ye are, as I must believe ye to be, from *your* promises at least, favourable to other projects which you and I understand and sanction."

"If any other man than Sir Alexander Edwards so aspersed my daughter's judgment as to suppose she could look with favour on any clod-hopper, as Santley is, I would count him my enemy for life; and that even Sir Alexander could so doubt me as to think I could break my pledged word, is a presumption founded on no just grounds," burst out Sir James, returning from the satisfied mood into which the first part of Sir Alexander's last sentences had put him, to his more usual irascibility; "and besides," he continued, "there was no other person, Sir Alexander, to show kindness by offering either advice or assistance at such a necessary moment."

"Excuse my differing with you, Sir James," interrupted or rather responded the other; "did you not notice how the young man allowed no time for any one else to interfere? However, I am only too happy in the knowledge of your and your daughter's dislike to such a *mesalliance*, to pursue the subject further. I would, however, beg you to pay particular attention to this Santley's conduct when he returns, and my life on it, but he will

offer his services to drive Miss Darcus home. But there he comes, and his own horse, too, in the carriage."

The vehicle was a sort of covered phaeton to be drawn by one horse, and Hubert had yoked Revenge in it, a "thing he would have done for no living neighbour save for Miss Darcus," as he afterwards expressed himself. The rector, it turned out, was from home with his carriage horses along with him, and the others were on the farm. Hubert alighted as the Baronets approached.

"I had to put Revenge to the traces, Sir James," said he; "and I would add that, save with myself, my horse is none of the safest, so that I feel it necessary to suggest that I should drive him home myself."

Sir James and Sir Alexander exchanged glances. The latter's countenance wore an expression of victory. Hubert noticed this play of features, and it set him thinking. To use the common expression, he "smelled a rat," and became watchful.

"So, gentlemen," he communed with himself; "you have a mutual understanding then; and you have been chatting lately, too; and I and my acts have come in for share of your plans. Well, 'tis well to be on one's guard; but I'll see the stuff both of you are made of before I yield; nor will the fault be on my side if I lose."

"My friend here, Sir Alexander, Mr. Santley," said Sir James, "prides himself upon his skill in managing restive or refractory horses—what think you of permitting him to drive my daughter home, and so give him an opportunity of proving his oft-boasted ability?"

"Willingly, Sir James, if you desire it, though I warn Sir Alexander he may meet his match in Revenge. Or better still, and surer, let him yoke his hunter into the carriage, and then, of course, there need be no fear."

Hubert knew well that neither of the Baronets would yoke in his horse, but he wished particularly to place Sir Alexander in a dilemma.

"No, no, Mr. Santley; that would look as if I feared to try your horse. I'll try the temper of yours first, and if I am beaten we may try the other plan then. I have rarely seen the horse

I could not make entirely tractable in twenty minutes or half-an-hour. But now, here is this animal of mine, the most obstinate I ever conquered, and I'll bet you one thousand pounds to one hundred he conquers you before I confess myself beaten by yours."

"I accept the bet, Sir Alexander," answered Hubert; "but in this way. Either you drive a mile or two along the road towards Heather Hall, while I remain ready to assist you if necessary; or remain you to give me help should I need you, while I am trying the temper and mettle of your horse—say which it shall be. But remember, should my horse remain in the carriage till the bet be settled, I claim the privilege of driving him home; that is, should you lose."

"So be it. And I'll drive one mile along the road and pull up there. When you see us stopping, you may bring Spitfire along our length—if you can;" and Sir Alexander slowly, sarcastically, and emphatically, pronounced the last three words as he concluded the sentence. That a horse which had given him so much trouble and taken so many trials to conquer, should yield to a few minutes' ruling by a stranger, was a supposition he could not by any means bring himself to admit; and therefore it was that he felt so rejoiced when Hubert answered:—"Agreed, Sir Alexander; and now get you into the phaeton while I inform Miss Darcus that she may proceed safely homewards."

While Hubert was conducting the lady out, he found time to whisper:—"Excuse my abruptness, but for old friendship's sake answer me candidly—which would you prefer to drive you home this evening, Sir Alexander Edwards or myself?"

Miss Darcus did not understand, because she did not hear, any of the arrangements the gentlemen had been making in her absence. With true feminine perception, however, she saw there was more behind the question, and that the present moment permitted no time for explanation; with generous candour, therefore, did she reply, whisperingly, by the single monosyllable, "You." Hubert had barely time to utter, "Fear not, then," when the phaeton was reached, into which he handed Miss Darcus

beside Sir Alexander, who had already taken his seat therein.

The arrangements regarding the trial of the horses, and the making of the bet, had been heard by one or two of the servants. The report soon spread to the "big house," and a crowd had gathered, as it always will gather on such and similar occasions, though no one can ever tell who spreads the news or summons the crowd. With the Baronets' servants, who had been in attendance for the hunt, the gardener's family, and some two score of labourers and children, well up to fifty were congregated around the place, when Hubert, seeing Miss Darcus comfortably fixed, turned towards them and said: "Now, Sir James, be kind enough to precede us to the road; and you, neighbours, will you follow him, that you may all see the settling of the bet, as I'll have to lead my horse up the lane."

A few perches of a lane led from the little open space in front of the gardener's cottage up to the main road, and along this Revenge was led by his owner. On reaching the highway, Hubert gave a glance of assurance to Miss Darcus, drew quickly to one side of the road, but slightly in advance of his horse's head, so that he was in sight of the animal's eye, and said sharply, "Now, Sir Alexander, try your skill, but be cautious." He then folded his arms across his breast, and coolly began to whistle "*Limerick Races*." And in the same spot and position he remained standing and softly whistling all the time of the trial.

The Baronet tightened the reins, gave a slight chirrup, and then addressed Revenge: "Now, good horse, forward. Forward, Revenge; up, man, that's a good horse." With these and such like expressions he tried to get the horse forward, but not a step in the right direction would Revenge take. He would go backwards, sideways, hopping, prancing, neighing, bolting, cock his ears, switch his tail, shake his head—anything at all but what Sir Alexander wanted him to do—take the straight road forward. Then a little touch of the whip was tried, but this was worse; while the evident danger of an upset soon compelled the Baronet to desist from that course. Then coaxing again, and patting, and whispering, and whistling, and chirrup-

ing were all tried alternately, but all proved equally useless in getting Revenge a single step homeward. For about twenty minutes the trial continued, and then Sir Alexander, maddened, disappointed, enraged, pulled the animal steady, and confessed he had lost the bet; "but only," said he, "because Miss Darcus is in the carriage. Give me your horse saddled and bridled, Mr. Santley, and I'll double the bets that I'll tame him and ride to Heather Hall or farther."

"We shall leave that for another time, Sir Alexander, but now——"

"Yes, yes, so we must, but let us now see you perform your part of the challenge," shouted the Baronet, biting his upper lip till the blood appeared.

"Where is your horse, Sir Alexander? You began your trial only on the main road here, and I claim the same privilege," said Hubert.

The Baronet's servant had remained inside the lane with his master's horse, and from there Sir Alexander ordered Spitfire to be brought forward. And meantime, Miss Darcus was cautioning and entreating Hubert to be careful, and not expose himself unnecessarily to danger.

"For your sake, Miss Darcus, and to humiliate Sir Alexander, I promise to be doubly careful."

At this moment the Baronet approached, leading Spitfire by the bridle. Hubert moved towards the animal's head; and while doing so he succeeded in catching his eye, which he held enthralled by his own until he caught the bridle. He continued his hold of the horse's eye until he questioned the Baronet:

"Do you guarantee, Sir Alexander, the strength and safety of Spitfire's harness?"

"I pledge my word of honour to its perfect security, Mr. Santley, in so far that I risked myself on it to-day during the hunt."

Sir Alexander had scarcely concluded the sentence when Hubert, with a single bound, leaped into the saddle, the bridle in his hand.

Spitfire gave a bound, and the trial began.

CHAPTER II.

Among the residents in the neighbourhood of Heather Hall lived a family of the name of McCool, who were half servants, half retainers of the Santley's; and whose eldest son, at the time to which the opening of this story refers, was known as the fester brother of Hubert Santley.

Edward McCool was as fine a specimen of the stout-limbed, hardy, Irish Celt as ever trod Erin's sod or swung the shillelah. In many a *camun* match, and in many a fight at a fair, he bore off the palm. Full of fun and frolic, harmless as a lamb when calm, yet fierce as a lion when angered, this young Hercules was the pride and admiration of his own neighbourhood and friends, but the envy and dislike of adjoining parishes and factions, whom defeat maddened, and whose chivalry—for they had a chivalry—could bear no conqueror, nor even an equal, in prowess. Many anecdotes of Ned are related by the peasantry who knew him, with all the raciness and vividness of admiration and delight. The following incident I heard told scores of times :

Owen Slevin was a neighbour of the McCools, and was one of those devil-may-care characters who are never happier than when in a frolicking fight; rarely, if ever, from under the ban of the law, but whose good fortune, watchfulness, or carelessness it was that always prevented their being taken by the officers, for policemen were not then in existence in Ireland, and soldiers were scarcer, while open defiance or covert dens were more common than now. Owen had the happy knack of getting into what would seem insurmountable difficulties to others, but from which, by some extraordinary freak of unexpected luck, he was sure to get free. At one time there were no less than thirteen warrants issued against him; and, stranger still, they were either for party fights or private distillation; for, though no fair or other gathering occurred within miles around without Owen's

being present, and both giving and receiving cuts, bruises, and knock-downs, yet such cases rarely entered the law courts; it was in the party cases, or where the gauger came in, that the power of the law was appealed to, and for these had the warrants for his apprehension been so often issued. It seemed, however, as if Owen led a charmed life; for, though after every fight he seemed, to a novice in the arts of the shillelah, wounded almost to death, yet the very next quarrel found him fresh and fiery as ever; and though he was often chased and "set" by the soldiers, some fortunate circumstance always turned up to prevent his being captured; nor was the pursuit often the less successful that traitors and informers were less numerous than they unfortunately are at the present time, in this year of grace one thousand eight hundred and seventy-one.

Matters had gone on in this manner for years with Owen, when, to free themselves from a desperate and determined enemy, as well as to prevent any further opposition from him, his religious opponents collected one evening, resolved to seize him by "hook or by crook," and either punish him themselves or hand him over to the authorities. Some were for the former, and some were for the latter. The arguments were waxing warm, when some one quietly remarked, "Dinna gut your fiah till ye get them." The pertinence of the proverb was instantly seen, and a laugh ensued.

There were several hundreds gathered, all well armed, and knowing where Slevin lay hidden, off they started across the country to the house he was lying in; lying, completely laid up from the recent effects of his last great fight, which had resulted in fever. Some masons were at work building a barn a few perches from Owen's covert, and chatting and laughing with the workmen stood Ned M'Cool, when the shouts and trampling of the approaching party were heard.

"For Owen Slevin, by Heaven!" shouted one of the masons from the high scaffolding on the wall.

It was evening, almost night. The sun had set, and twilight was deepening over the earth, giving that hazy indistinctness to objects, more especially those at a distance, which confuses the

beholder, and makes him uncertain as to the exact nature of an object. The peculiarity of the moment assisted in the ruse. Ned McCool quietly took off his coat, threw it over his arm, crept a short distance away along the shadowed side of a hawthorn fence, and then rising to his full height of six feet two inches, away he sped, right over the fences, ditches, and hedges of the open country, in full view of the nearing crowd!

Though there was certainly a great difference between the appearance of Ned and Owen, yet the twilight and the distance, short as it was, and the rapid flight, were good fair proofs that the fugitive was surely Owen Slevin, so the crowd, with a fierce shout of victory and a few rambling shots at the running man, scattered and followed in wild pursuit.

There was no man in the country, however, who could equal, much less overtake, Ned; so he kept leading them on for nearly two miles, at times visible to them, and again invisible to them; but at length he so quickened his speed that they completely lost sight of him. When he made certain that he had succeeded in doing this, he slackened his speed to a walk, put on his coat which he had kept hanging on his arm during his race, leaped on to the road towards which he had been gradually directing his footsteps, and along which he could now hear his pursuers hastening, and coolly turned and met them, seeming like a quiet wayfarer returning from the neighbouring town. The foremost of the crowd questioned him if he had met anyone along the road as he came along.*

"There was somebody came running down the fields there a little ago," he answered; "and ran along the road. What's the matter?"

They all knew Ned, and knew, too, his tendencies, that they would be on the side of their enemy, Owen Slevin, so they answered him: "Oh, nothing. We only want to catch the man," and away they went with renewed speed, to be certain that they would gain the time lost speaking to Ned.

It is hardly necessary to say that the chase was unsuccessful,

* A fact.

and Owen escaped again, thanks to the vigilance of Ned McCool.

Curious, too, is it not? That Owen's opponents never gathered on him again after that evening; and it was many years after the event, when religious strife had ceased to be so prevalent as then, when they heard that it was Ned McCool himself they chased on the occasion, and not Owen Slevin. They never retaliated; and the strong phalanx Ned led astray had decreased to a small fraction of their then number, ere his ruse become known. This occurrence is an illustration of Ned's character, the leading points of which will be more clearly understood as this story proceeds. Let it be also understood distinctly, that Ned McCool is no creature of the imagination; many, many yet living, should this story fall into their hands, will easily recognise him, and not him alone, but the greater number of the incidents mentioned in these pages. To the direct narration, however.

On the same evening and about the same time that Sir Alexander Edwards lost the bet in trying Hubert Santley's horse, two men were busily engaged in cleaning up a large barn which stood in a field about four miles from Heather Hall. The barn stood a few score yards, say half-a-dozen, up the field, which itself bordered the main road leading past Heather Hall. One end of the barn was closely packed with straw, up almost to the roof-ridge; while the other end of the barn had just been swept clean by the two men, the only articles in it being a few chairs and a table. On this latter article there were three plates, proving pretty plainly that a collection would be made.

The two men finished the cleansing operation to their satisfaction, after which they went out, only hasping the door behind them, but were only gone a few minutes, carrying two long forms with them when they returned. These they left on the barn floor, and again went away. Again they returned with two more, and afterwards with two more, and so on until the clean end of the barn was well filled with seats, when they again went away, this time seemingly to a greater distance than before.

Scarcely were they out of sight, when two very different persons approached the barn very cautiously; and on seeing the

"coast clear." after a careful reconnoitre they opened the door and entered. One of these was a tall, straight, athletic negro; and the other seemed a ploughman or general farm servant of the neighbourhood.

Who this negro was no one seemed to know. He had appeared on several occasions lately, and the supposition had consequently arisen that he must be the servant of some of the resident neighbouring gentry. Hence many enquiries were set on foot, but none of them was successful. The only person who had ever been seen speaking with him was Hubert Santley, and it was surmised that he could surely give any necessary satisfaction regarding "poor darkey." Whether he could or not, he never let the curious public know, as he always met enquiries on the matter in such a way that he rarely, in fact never, was questioned twice by the same individual.

The black, on entering the barn, carried some bundle under his coat. Both he and his companion, by rather extraordinary exertions, succeeded in gaining the top of the straw heap, where they laid themselves flat down on their faces, in such a position as to command a good view of the floor below, while they were themselves well hidden from any up-turned look, by the straw they gathered around their heads.

They had lain thus ensconced for nearly fifteen minutes without any disturbance, but at length two persons—a man and a woman—entered. They dropped some coins on one of the plates on the table, then moved quietly forward to one of the forms, sat down, and began chatting in a subdued voice. Immediately after, some more persons came in, deposited their mites on the plates, and passed on to seats. This went on until the barn became filled with persons of both sexes—filled to suffocation, many having to remain outside the building altogether.

At length one who seemed to be a leader arose and announced that, "according to previous announcement, the so very celebrated preacher they expected would certainly be present, but that he was unavoidably detained some minutes longer than he originally intended;" and that, meantime, they would proceed with a little devotion until his arrival.

This proposition seeming very acceptable to the company, the same speaker began a prayer, a "short one" he said; but it proved so long that, ere its conclusion, the very celebrated preacher arrived. A few minutes were given to collecting himself, to lighting some candles, and to making a short prayer, and the great man began his sermon, "which was," he said, "according to the advertisement previously published, on the Last Judgment."

Affectingly, grandly, and beautifully, did he proceed till he reached the stage where the angel should sound the trumpet to call forth all nations to the final valley of settlement. Here the feelings of the audience found vent in groanings, sighings and weepings; and the speaker surpassed himself.

"Then, dearest brethren," said he; "the angel shall go forth, and in those thunder tones which shall penetrate to the innermost and outermost corners of the broad earth, to the bottom of the mighty deep as to the loftiest summits of the loftiest mountains, to the lonely graves on the lonely hill-side, and to the bleached bones on Zahara's desert breast as well as to the civilized beauties whose graces and virtues the decorations of modern cemeteries attest; to the sinner and the saint, the godly and the ungodly, to all and everywhere and every person, to you, and you, and you, and to me; shall those thunder tones of that last dreadful trumpet penetrate, awakening, awing, terrifying, and revivifying in piercing alarm for the Great Judgment——"

A terrible sound and sight at this stage stopped further proceedings on the part of the preacher or his congregation. The negro had cautiously slid the bundle from under his coat, showing it to be an immense trumpet-horn; this he protruded over the straw-heap, and, inhaling a chest full of air, he blew one loud, long, echoing peal, truly and really in "thunder tones!"

One upward glance from the meeting, and the black face, swollen cheeks, extended eye-balls, and sounding trumpet were beheld! A yell of horror and terror arose; and with a wild shout of "Satan! Satan!" all rushed pell-mell from the barn in hurried, maddened confusion, overturning seats, table, chairs, candles and money, in their alarmed haste. No thought was to

be given to the subscriptions on such an occasion; all were too terrified, now that the last day, as they fancied, was come, to attend to such dross. Nor were the confusion and haste lessened by seeing his Satanic Majesty descend from his lofty throne with lightning speed, surrounded by flaming globes of fire; the fact being that the negro had leaned forward too far and so over-balanced himself, coming tumbling to the floor, accompanied by his comrade and several bunches of the straw, these latter seeming, to the already over-astonished eyes of the beholders, so many balls of fire; while the groaning and bellowing of the trumpet proceeded more fearfully than at first, lending an additional impetus to the excited force of the fleeing crowd!*

In a few seconds the barn was emptied of every individual save the two mischief-makers, who now struck a light, then proceeded leisurely to gather up the money, which lay scattered over the floor. This done, they departed, laughing heartily, and took the direction towards Heather Hall.

Passing along they came to a lonely, dilapidated house, in which there was scarcely a whole pane in the windows, nor a handful of thatch on the roof.

And yet, in that dwelling resided seven of a family, five of whom were lying ill of a fever, and all in absolute destitution! Yes, in the very essence of destitution! Meat nor money, clothing nor furniture was there under the roof! And the time was, nor was it far distant either, when health and plenty were in the fullest abundance in that same dwelling. The father was a blacksmith, the best and busiest in the neighbourhood. Years and years he laboured soberly and carefully, while his family were happy and healthy. At length he became a slave to the cursed, treble cursed, whiskey; and his trade dwindled away, because unattended to; his wife exerted herself hard at her wheel to support her little children, but when her husband was carried home dead to her one night, and when the shock and consequent trouble threw her on a bed of sickness, the gnawing fangs of hunger grappled on the little ones, fever set in, and on boards, with scarcely sufficient to form a covering, lay the poor mother

* A fact.

and her five children, while crawling about over the cold floor, but too weak to work, crept the eldest child, a little girl.

In through one of the broken windows of this house the negro, as he and his companion passed on, jerked in the money they had gathered in the barn.

"Oh, mamma, mamma, we'll get some meat now, for dada has sent us money!" wailed forth the little girl. But when she got no answer, and slid up to the bed, and knelt down beside her mother, and stooped to kiss the thin worn mouth, and put her two little wan hands over the attenuated cheeks that once bloomed fair and fresh, she again wailed out—"Oh, mamma, mamma dear, you are so cold, cold, cold, cold! Oh, will you not speak to Elly?"

Poor little thing, she was an orphan now in reality—her mother was no more! No wonder death came strange to her, for she had never encountered him or his ghastly labour before, never been brought face to face with the stiff, cold dead!

Such a result of intoxicating habits!

When in an hour or two after the money was thrown into the house, a poor woman, accustomed to call in the evenings, went in, she found little Elly lying senseless across her dead mother's bosom, while beside them, two of the little babies had also departed from this world of trouble. Though the money was too late to save the lives of the mother and her two little ones, it was the means of preserving the remaining members of the family, and burying those already dead, without making them a case of charity, or a burden on the neighbours.

CHAPTER III.

A long winding avenue, gradually ascending, and well bordered by stately trees, was the approach to a rather elegant and solid mansion, built in the Moorish style of architecture. Up this avenue, about ten o'clock on the evening—or rather night—of the fox-hunt, rode three horsemen. Place the mansion on the loneliest side of Croghy Hill, imagine some impalpable reports about robberies or Ribbonmen to have annoyed the cowardly, who, in this, as in all similar phases, magnified the molehill into the mountain, consider the effect which a few extra bumpers of wine and brandy would have, when the average quantity trebled the cowardice, and the incident about to be related regarding Sir Alexander Edwards—for he and his two servants were the three horsemen referred to above—will be the better understood and appreciated. The baronet had delayed longer than he would have really wished at Heather Hall, warning Sir James Darcus of the danger of permitting Hubert Santley to associate with Miss Darcus, and constantly reminding him of some understanding unknown to all but themselves.

Sir Alexander had, in fact, become so exasperated against Hubert by the events of the evening that he suddenly resolved to push his brother baronet to the very extreme, by coaxing or compelling him to forbid Hubert the entrance to Heather Hall at all.

How he did rage when he saw Spitfire conquered in the trial; nor was his passionate madness made less by his own previous defeat. It has been said that Hubert leaped on Spitfire's back, with his hand still grasping the bridle.

“No feet Fitz-James in stirrup staid,
No grasp upon the saddle laid,
But wreathed his left hand in the mane,
And lightly bounded from the plain,

Turned on the horse his armed heel,
And stirred his courage with his steel.
Bounded the fiery steed in air,
The rider sate erect and fair,
Then like a bolt from steel crossbow,
Forth launched, along the plain they go."

Like Sir Walter's Fitz-James, Hubert "bounded" on the steed; and like Bayard did the animal bound in air. Then away through fields and gardens, over drains and fences, across lea, quagmire, or potatoes. The horse's first leap when he found a stranger on his back was right over the hawthorn hedge by the roadside, and deep and strong did Hubert dig the spurs into his sides. In attempting the second leap the horse bolted, and but that Hubert was expecting such a movement, he assuredly would have been unseated; as it was, however, he was prepared, and so retained his position. He then wheeled Spitfire, and put him to the leap again, striking him a sharp blow on the ears as he was coming forward, and over they went. And then away and away, over high leaps and broad ones, Hubert facing Spitfire at all the difficult ones he could meet, and the animal now clearing them all boldly and unflinchingly. In something less than fifteen minutes, Hubert, who had been guiding Spitfire in somewhat of a circular direction, and was now approaching his party again, felt the animal beginning to be obedient to the rein. A few trials, and he brought him to a standstill, after which he walked him slowly forward to Sir Alexander, turning him and stopping him several times as he drew near.

"I think, Sir Alexander, you will find Spitfire quiet enough now. Except Revenge, he is the best leaper I ever rode."

Hubert was coolly dismounting as he spoke.

"I confess, Mr. Santley, you have won the bet this time. I trust, however, we may have another day for it. I shall send you a cheque for the amount to-morrow." Here was love again, love of revenge.

Without uttering another word, Sir Alexander turned half insultingly to his brother baronet, while Hubert was permitted, unmolested, to drive the phaeton home, and thus have the plea-

sure of Miss Darcus's society.

"I am wondering, Mr. Santley," said his companion as they drove along, "how you have trained Revenge to be so stubborn; may I enquire if your whistling had anything to do in the affair?"

"I am glad Sir Alexander has been less sharp than you," replied Hubert; "my whistling was the means of making him lose the bet."

"So I fancied, though I am somewhat puzzled as to why you would venture on so uncertain a security."

"Not so uncertain if you knew Revenge's nature. I have amused myself at spare hours in training him to do some clever tricks. All the power of man, whip, or spur, could not put him forward while I keep standing whistling in his view; nor could any common power prevent his coming to me if I gave a peculiar cry. When he was but a foal, I used to bring him from the farthest end of the farm by this cry, and I have kept it up ever since. I have tried two, and sometimes three, of our servants to hold him when I would call on him, but he would jerk them away like feathers and come trotting, neighing, up to me. No, no, Miss Darcus, I had no fear that Revenge would deny his training to-day."

There was silence for a few minutes after this, the two occupants of the phaeton seemingly puzzled what to say next. And is it not often so, that even when the heart is fullest and most anxious for deliverance from the sweet burden from which it wishes to be freed, one is unable to give expression to his thoughts? The pulse will beat more quickly, the blood course more swiftly, the flush rise more rapidly to the countenance, the heart throb more thrillingly, and yet utterance is denied to us; the strength and tremulousness of our feelings overpower us, and the opportunity we had wished and panted for so long, and which has arrived at length, slips past to our infinite regret and dismay, and in our solitude we are ready to curse the timidity or bashfulness that prevented our speaking as we so often previously resolved to speak.

Thus was it with Hubert now. He wished to speak, but his timidity conjured up legions of imaginary difficulties; and in-

stead of seizing the opportunity presented to him, he kept gazing earnestly and affectionately at Revenge. He determined at length to break the silence.

"I have been thinking, Miss Darcus, of a question I would like to ask you if I thought it wouldn't anger you!"

"And pray, Mr. Santley, how are you to penetrate the mystery without putting the question?"

"By going on the belief that your good nature wouldn't feel offended at anything I would say, I intend putting the question."

"Take care, take care. That sounds very like flattery, and you know, if you would preserve my friendship, you must never say anything approaching to that."

"Thank you, Miss Darcus, I was near forgetting myself. Please forgive me."

"Forgiven, Mr. Santley, but don't repeat the offence; and now ask your question, so that you may know whether I'll be angry or not."

"Thanks for the kind permission. Well, then; have you any notion why Sir Alexander Edwards was so anxious to interfere in my arrangements this evening?"

"And is that the mouse you have brought forth, after such notes of preparatory warning? To be sure I know why he tried to put you down—did you not win the chase to-day, and was that not sufficient to excite his spleen?"

"But do you know of no other reason?"

"Now, pray, do you think me omniscient, that I should know of Sir Alexander's intentions regarding his actions?"

"But that does not answer my question?"

"It should be a sufficient answer."

"True; it *should* have been, but it isn't."

"And what would you like me to say?"

"The 'plain, unvarnished,' straightforward truth."

"But should I not know that?"

"As far as you do know."

"Then as far as I do know I believe he had private reasons. What these are I think I know; but as I am not certain I beg to be excused from mentioning my fancies on the matter."

"I wonder do our notions coincide? If I tell my thoughts, will you tell yours?"

"I am sorry I must refuse even that."

"Thank you, thank you."

"'Thank you!' Thank me for what, Mr. Santley?"

"For refusing to meet me on equal grounds."

"And why do you thank me for that?"

"Because your refusal to do so proves that you think there is something personal in the explanation, and as that opinion agrees with my own, we are probably right."

"'Oh, most wise and upright judge!' How very infallible you must consider your perceptions! On my word, Mr. Santley, you deserve credit for your agility in leaping at conclusions!"

"But more for my acuteness in discerning your thoughts. Seriously, Miss Darcus, I am fancying that Sir Alexander has his eye on you for some object of his, and perhaps some ill-natured busy-body has been telling him there is danger in permitting companions from childhood, as we were, to associate when grown up?"

"I trust Sir Alexander may dare to dictate to me what my conduct is to be! Should he try such a thing once, I pledge my lady word he'll not be in a hurry to repeat the performance. I allow no one to dictate to me, Mr. Santley."

"Except those you love. May I ask if you have remarked anything peculiar in our conversation this evening?"

"I would be blind, indeed, did I not notice your calling me 'Miss Darcus' all the time."

"You know I never did so before, when by ourselves; and I assure you I am resolved to drop it, Annie."

"And I am glad to hear your resolution, Hubert."

The two Baronets, who had been riding at a moderate distance behind the phaeton, now closed up; and as Heather Hall was just convenient, there was no time for further conversation. Hubert assisted Miss Darcus to alight, while servants took the horses' heads.

"I must trouble you, Sir James, to send some of your servants with the carriage to the rector's to-morrow."

"Certainly, Mr. Santley; but are you not coming in to join us in a glass of wine and some refreshment?"

Hubert's first impulse was to accept Sir James's invitation. Indeed, it was a practice of his, to accept every such request. If the kindness were wished to you, he argued, you pained by refusing it; and if it were only offered as a sort of sham, then by accepting it you turned the tables, and "bit the biter."

And Hubert was right. There are people who are proverbial for always proffering kindnesses that they hope and believe will be refused. Could such persons, then, be better punished than by closing at once with their invitations?

The present writer once knew a family whose hobby it was to invite all of a certain sort of intimate strangers—if such an expression be legitimate—to breakfast, drive, or sup, as the case might be; and if bed-time were near, the visitor must certainly stop all night. A young doctor was visiting in the town, and called in one evening late to see the family. The chat went on in good style, until the man of medicine thought it time to leave.

No such thing, ejaculated *mater*.

Couldn't hear of it, echoed *pater*.

You'll surely not go out the night, chimed in *frater*.

Oh, do stay, sweepstaked *soror*.

No, no, no, the doctor couldn't think of such a thing; his friends would be sitting up for him, for he said he would certainly be with them by eleven.

Well, let them wait, and *pater* caught him by the left breast button and the right breast coat-collar.

You can stay with them another night, and *mater* made claim to his right arm.

Come, now, don't be stiff, and *soror* sweetly smiled and made love to his left arm.

Don't be so ill to force, doctor, and *frater* tried his propelling powers at hind quarters.

It's too much, friends; I oughtn't to accept it, but I don't like to be rude, so just let my friends wait till they're tired, coolly announced M.D.

Hem! A collapse ensued, and silence fell on the friendly

family. The guest chatted, and laughed, and joked, and rubbed his hands, and made himself quite at home, but a sudden dumbness seized the hospitable hosts; and *pater* soon complained that his chronic pulmonary disease attacked him when he sat up late, so he should retire.

Mater, with a sense of her proper duty to husband, acted the part of the ancient link-boy, but her memory failed to point her out the backward path to the kitchen.

Soror apologized for her absence, but it was her lot to extinguish the candle in her parents' bed-room every night.

So *frater* and our friend the doctor were a happy pair, the chat and fun, however, being all on the latter's side.

At this stage a friendly hand lifted the latch, while an enquiry was made why the doctor was staying so late.

It was opportune, but it had been so arranged. That if he did not return at a certain hour, he would be coaxed to consent to stop all night, and then to be sent for about midnight.

At any rate, the family were cured of their mean propensity, for they were never afterwards known to give an invitation but a good *bona fide* one.

Now Hubert was of the same mind on this point as the young doctor was; and when Sir James gave him the invitation, he knew it was only for politeness sake, and half resolved to go in and so prevent Sir Alexander's *tete-a-tete*, but his other nature prevailed, and he refused.

"I believe, Sir James, it will be late enough when I get home. Times are said to be unsafe now, and I don't like risking any danger."

"I didn't think you would be any way afraid, Mr. Santley;" sneered Sir Alexander.

"Prudence is the best part of valour, Sir Alexander. Good night, Miss Darcus—good night, Annie," he repeated in a lower voice, as she gave him her hand, and returned his warm grasp warmly as his own; "good night, gentlemen." He had been helping to unyoke Revenge, and leaped on his back as he spoke; with a parting glance at the party he was leaving, and a closer one at Annie in particular, he rode homewards. It was long

after, as has been said, when Sir Alexander left Heather Hall, and to him let us now return, where we left him riding up his avenue to his mansion of Rosedale.

Let his surprise and alarm be imagined when, soon after entering his park gate, he beheld a wayfarer on the path before him; the glimmering of the starlight generated uncertainty as to the person's movements, and a bundle of what seemed pike-staffs on his shoulder, increased Sir Alexander's terror. Though accompanied by his two servants, and in sight of Rosedale House, his miserable cowardly fear prevented his advancing further, till more assistance would be procured. The porter's cottage was, fortunately, convenient; so, with the porter and his son as allies and in the front to face the danger, the valiant Baronet proceeded to the attack. The unfortunate pikeman was moving carelessly forward, evidently unsuspecting of any assault, and restlessly humming snatches of the popular refrain,

"I'll ne'er be drunk again;

Oh, I broke my leg on a whiskey keg,

And I'll ne'er be drunk again."

While now and then he parodied the song by

"I'll always be drunk when I can;

Oh, I'll drink and eat of the whiskey sweet,

And I'll always be drunk when I can!"

Suddenly a grasp was laid roughly and tightly on his shoulder, and he was told he was a prisoner!

"A p-p-prisoner!" he ejaculated; "an' wh-wh-what am I a p-p-prisoner for, I'd like to know, d-d-d-damn you?"

"Come, men," shouted Sir Alexander, keeping a respectful distance from the prisoner; "bring him along, he is only feigning drunkenness. We'll soon tell him what he is a prisoner for with his bundle of pikes so late and so near my house. Bring him along, and be watchful, lest he has accomplices who will try to rescue him."

So they gruffly dragged him on to the mansion, and threw him into the dark strong room which was fixed specially in which to confine the prisoners brought before Sir Alexander in

his magisterial capacity. A messenger was then despatched post haste to the town of Moneyfin, three miles off, for a brother magistrate, Colonel Warburton, to hurry to Rosedale, for that "one of the cursed Irish Ribbonmen was a prisoner, having been taken with a bundle of pikes on his shoulder."

The Colonel, Sir Alexander knew, was a fierce, relentless enemy of the whole Irish race, and on such an occasion as the present, would not hesitate to inflict summary punishment; while he was, himself, overjoyed at having such a famous opportunity of proving his watchfulness for, and fealty towards, Government, and of wreaking his cowardly spleen upon an inhabitant for imaginary acts of terror, boldness, or rebellion. Nor was the hope that the seizure might hasten his coveted elevation to the peerage a slight weight in the balance of his mind. For Sir Alexander was ambitious, in love with an earldom.

Colonel Warburton is to fill a pretty important part in this story, and, therefore, a few words regarding him will not be considered inappropriate.

He was a man of about forty-five years of age. In his younger days his position was less exalted than now—he was simply a ganger. Placed in a backward country village, his vanity and egotism sought vent in making love to all the pretty maidens of the neighbourhood, and among others his libertine glances rested on was a very handsome young girl named Ellen O'Ronan. A pure, high-minded, honourable, and ingenuous girl Ellen was, as ever breathed the "breath of life." Candid and unsuspicious as her nature was, she listened with pleasure to the sweet phrases and honeyed words of Ronald Warburton, the handsome young ganger. No thought of evil had ever been harboured within her pure breast; her rustic life, without any ignorant rusticity about her, had passed along unknowing aught of the world's evils; equally unacquainted with the wiles as with the follies, with the temptations as with the tempters, with the deceptions as with the deceivers, of the votaries of fashion and society, her heart had almost gone to her admirer. His insidious, libertine mind

ultimately showed itself; his foul proposals brought her to a realisation of the fearful precipice over which she had been toppling; and with a glance of concentrated scorn and a denial with ineffable emphasis, she dismissed him from her presence at once and for ever. Not that she hated him; her feelings were too fine, too pure for that; but she simply banished him from her company and her mind, instantaneously and effectively.

As for him, his misnamed affection became a burning desire for revenge; and a determination to seize the first opportunity that would offer for him to wreak his vengeance on her was the result of his ignominious and hasty dismissal. He had not long, unfortunately, to wait.

Ellen had a married sister, Mrs. Mary Nelis, living in Clonleek, the town which was the headquarters and residence of the gauger. Mr. Nelis was the leading and most prosperous merchant grocer in Clonleek, and was in the habit of getting much of his goods from Moneyfin, which was exactly five miles off. One market day of Moneyfin he and his servant went there with their horse and cart, to purchase goods. The purchases being made, the master despatched the servant homewards with the horse and goods, while as the evening was fine, he would himself, he said, walk on after.

When the servant entered Clonleek, he noticed the gauger sitting on the little seat at his door; and when he drove forward the other rose, and approached him, demanding as he did so what was in the cart?

"Some shop goods for the master."

"Who is your master?"

"Troth, then, the deil gae ye the information; as if ye didn't know Mashter Nelis's horse!"

"Mr. Nelis's! And what goods have you?"

"Flour an' meal an' whiskey an' tobacco an'——"

"Never mind the rest; show me your permit for the tobacco and whiskey."

"I niver have the permit," answered the astonished servant; "mashter has it there comin' along ahint me."

"I don't care who has it. Unless you can show it I must seize the goods in the king's name."

"If Miss Ellen had spoke ye fair, ye wouldn't be so watchful now."

"I must do my duty. Here, in the king's name, I command you to assist me into my lodgings with these illicit goods."

"*In the king's name*" has a great power over some people; so it needs scarcely be wondered at that the servant assisted the gauger to carry in some of the goods. And then he went on home with the remainder and told the affair to his mistress.

Miss O'Ronan was in her sister's when the servant told his story.

"Send him up with your compliments for the goods, Mary," said she.

"Yes; Willy, go up and tell Mr. Warburton that if he be kind enough to let me have the goods now till Mr. Nelis comes, if we can't show him the permit then, I'll send them up to him again."

"She can't have them," was the gauger's reply, when Willy delivered the message from Mrs. Nelis.

"She shall have them," was Ellen's comment when Willy told the gauger's answer to the mistress, and she meant it too. She went up to the lodgings, where the goods were, and brought the servant with her. When she went in her former admirer was sitting before the fire, watching the roasting of a piece of meat on the gridiron.

"I have come for my brother-in-law's goods, Mr. Warburton."

"You can't have them, Miss O'Ronan."

"I am come for them; I must have them, and I shan't go without them."

"You can't have them; you shan't have them; and you'll not get them should you stay till doomsday, so you may go to Connaught or the devil and whistle for them," came the bold and irreverent answer.

For an instant the blood fled from Ellen's cheek, as like a flash of lightning came the remembrance of the sweetness and softness with which she once thought the speaker endowed; and she then

flushed red as scarlet. The spirit of her race was roused, for in her veins coursed the blood of princes, chiefs and kings, that could ill brook insult or contempt; so snatching the gridiron off the fire, she struck the gauger across the forehead with it, stretching him senseless on the floor. Standing beside him, she ordered the servant to find his master's goods, and carry them down; this she saw done, and then she coolly followed down to her sister's.*

When Warburton got to himself again, he saw that the goods were away, and that his revengeful retaliation was this time spoiled unless by great exertion; but when he saw his bleeding forehead in the mirror, he swore a dreadful oath of vengeance. Snatching a couple of pistols, one in every hand, he ran down the street to Mr. Nelis's. Mrs. Nelis saw him coming, and fearing that something was about to happen, she pushed Ellen into the room, and locked the door.

"Where are those goods, Mrs. Nelis? In the king's name, I demand them."

"What goods, Mr. Warburton?" enquired she, quite innocently like. She was standing with her back to the fire in the kitchen, and he stood facing her, thus having his back to the room in which Ellen was locked, through the keyhole of which she kept watching every motion of the two in the culinary apartment.

"I have sworn, madam, to have those goods. Look at my bleeding face, and be certain I am not to be trifled with. Yes, by —, I'll have the goods I seized or a life."

"What do I know about the goods you refer to?"

"Your sister does—let her appear and answer where they are."

"I think, sir, she has no taste for your society, and will likely not see you."

He raised his hands, a charged and cocked pistol in each, and pointing them at Mrs. Nelis, he again swore another oath that he would have the goods or a life. What he would have done is uncertain, for he was mad at the time; but Ellen through the keyhole saw the crisis, and bursting open the door, she leaped

* A fact.

forward, caught the gauger by the collar, put her right knee against his back, threw him down, snatched the pistols from his hands, put her foot upon his breast, pointed a pistol towards him, and calmly and convincingly said:—"Look, Mr. Renald Warburton, look up to the roof; do you see that side of pork hanging there? Well, watch my shot;" and, elevating her right hand, she emptied one of the pistols at the cord by which the pork hung; the great fitch came tumbling in very dangerous closeness to Warburton's head, making him shudder all over at the narrowness of his escape, while Ellen continued:—"Now, listen, sir, I'll not shoot you, which you see I can do; but the first motion I see you making to rise, I'll maim you so that you'll be a show for life." She then sat down on a chair at a distance of two steps from her prisoner, keeping the pistol pointed towards him. The news of the circumstance soon spread, the crowd collected, and when, in less than an hour, Mr. Nelis came home, he could scarcely reach his own door, so great was the throng. He heard the story with anger and surprise commingled; but of course he showed his permit and the gauger departed immediately. Ellen sought her bedroom; when she was wanted, for her health and happiness to be drunk—for whiskey was scattered in gallons through Clonleek that night—and her sister went to find her, she was lying senseless on the floor, the excitement was too much for her.*

Warburton registered a vow that night that he would never again suffer seized goods to escape him. Clonleek, however, was no place for him any more, he felt; so he applied for a change of district, and was removed many miles away.

Soon after his arrival in his new district, he was out one evening with the soldiers, looking for a private still, which he had been informed was in operation in a certain locality. He was successful in making the seizure; men, whiskey, and apparatus—all but the "worm"—were caught. Anxious to get the "worm" too, he instituted a search for it. He was in the outside, and right from before him away started a young girl, with

* A fact all through.

the coveted "worm" under her arm. He gave chase, but found to his mortification he had met—or rather was following—more than his match. Finding that he risked losing his prize should he not overtake the girl, he did his very utmost, but in vain, so he shouted to her to stop or he'd fire. She ran on, he shouted again, but she heeded him not. He raised his hand, fired, and the girl fell. Fell dead! and within twenty yards of her mother's cottage. The shot brought out the mother, accompanied by three little children, in time to see the murderer stooping to pick up the worm. Her heart intuitively told the poor widow that her daughter was shot, and that the murderer was before her, though she hardly realised the loss at first; but when she did, she threw herself on her knees beside the corpse, and prayed that a terrible retribution might fall on the murderer of her child, his "seed, breed, and generation."

"May the Almighty shower wealth on him only for a curse; may his deathbed be uneasy both on land and sea; may fire, air, and water shudder, foam, and rage, at his death, or at the death of any one of his breed; may their happiness be short and their punishment lasting—the children and grandchildren of the murderer of my child, his brothers and sisters and relations."

"And when will your curse cease, granny?"

It was Ronald Warburton who mockingly and unwisely put the question to the weeping widow.

"When none of your race is on the face of the earth, not sooner; or when years and years of a lonely repentant life teaches you to be a sorrowing old man for yere crimes;" and the old woman raised her two hands, with their palms towards him, as if to drive him away, and shut him from her sight, lest she might be tempted to curse him again; for it was her grief that spoke his anathema, not her heart.

The gauger departed from the place, and soon after disappeared from the country, no one seeming to know aught of his residence or movements; and when, a quarter of a century afterwards, a Captain Warburton was found in a regiment of soldiers stationed in Dublin, or when he purchased the Colonelcy of another regiment, and was sent to Moneyfin, no one remembered the erewhile

gauger, or recognised him in the present officer, though he was often in Clonleek.

Of these circumstances in the life of Colonel Warburton, Sir Alexander Edwards knew nothing, though he often found himself wondering at the Colonel's inveterate hatred of the Irish race. Whether the events above mentioned had aught to do in originating or keeping alive this feeling of the Colonel, may be imagined.

And this is the man, whom let us now follow as he gallops with his guard up to Rosedale. His first enquiry was characteristic of the man-devil he was.

"Where is this damned son of an Irish whelp now?"

Sir Alexander marshalled his servants, the Colonel and his men drew their swords, and then, two deep, they valiantly marched to the solitary apartment where the solitary prisoner was confined. The door was thrown open with a dash, while there was a slight pause among the attacking party as if they feared an outward rush, and they charged then in full force. The light soon showed the prisoner, calmly sleeping on the floor, and the bundle of pike-staffs beside him. The Colonel gave him a touch with his sword, and he grunted and raised his head.

"By Heavens, Sir Alexander, your fears have made a fool of you. This is only the poor devil of a carpenter I sent to-day to get a few shovel shafts for me to work in the garden; and he has got himself well drunk! Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha!"*

And the soldiers chimed in. The rage of the baronet was equalled only by the laughter and mirth of the Colonel and his men; and the cellars of Rosedale were emptied of many a bottle ere the soldiers promised silence, a promise which may have been kept till the barracks were reached, but no longer, for ere noon next day "Sir Alexander's prisoner" was told of far and near—for the next day was a fair day in Moneyfin—and the joke was retailed as a standing jest against the Baronet for many a day, though more important matters soon occurred.

* A similar scene occurred not many months ago with a J.P. of the county Donegal during the Fenian scare.

CHAPTER IV.

The Porters of Magheraporter were a respectable connexion of people. They stood midway in social position between the Baronet or Viscount and the common more well-to-do farmer. Several of them had been magistrates during troublesome periods of our country's history, and had generally acquitted themselves to the satisfaction of both Government and people—a rather difficult task; while two of them had been High Sheriffs of the county. They were also very ancient, and were fond of tracing their descent from more than one source, boasting of having blood from Irish, Scotch, and English kings. And they were at one time very numerous; but they had gradually "grown small by degrees and beautifully less" in numerical strength, until their family pride and ancestral respectability culminated in the last of their race, Miss Sophia Porter, as prim and eccentric, yet withal as charitable, a spinster as ever belonged to that much maligned class of beings, old maids. Not that she was so very old either; only about sixty, one or two in or over; but she seemed nearer ninety than sixty. It was frequently remarked how aged and decrepit and heart-broken she had come to seem for the past ten or twenty years. At the age of thirty-five she looked little more than if she were twenty; and many an offer of marriage she had refused after she reached forty. Unless some mental calamity had befallen her, mere years could never, it was said, have wrought such premature anility. Whether any such misfortune had ever occurred, was not generally known; the only person supposed to know her private affairs was an old servant, as eccentric, as prim, and as charitable as the mistress.

At the age of sixty, however, Miss Porter received a summons she could neither refuse nor put off. She passed away, calmly and silently, with no one by her side but her old servant. Not

always thus would one of the Porters have passed away. Time was when doctors and clergymen and friends and relatives would have been by the bedside of a departing member of the family. But now all was changed. There had been no society, no retinue of pampered servants, no dinner parties, nor supper reunions, for many a day; no company for Miss Sophia at all but her favourite old servant. And lonely as she had lately lived, she had died as lonely. For years "she had never stretched her side in a bed," as the saying is; she eat on her "hunkers" by the fireside; that is, partly on the ground and partly on her heels drawn up close under her. In this position she died. Not without expecting death, and being prepared for it. But a few evenings previously she had said to her old servant: "Catherine," said she, "I will soon die now. In the little box at the head of my old bed, under the pillow, you will find my will, written at the time *he*"—ah, then, there was a secret weighing her down, and driving her into an early grave—"went away. I made no change in the original then, but I have added two or three codicils, giving to our young friend of the night of the robbery what I intended for the other, but leaving plenty for you while you live."

She hardly spoke again.

When the news spread through the neighbourhood that Miss Porter of Magheraporter was dead, there gathered such a "wake" as was never seen in the country before or since. There were tea and whiskey, and pipes and tobacco *galore*; for old Catherine, or Caty, as she was more familiarly called, said she would bury Miss Porter, "her dear good mistress, as one in the land never was buried in the memory of man."

The death took place just about the very moment that Miss Darcus was thrown into the Avonbuoy crossing after the fox; and about the time that Sir Alexander Edwards noticed the pike-man in his avenue the people were beginning to gather to Castleporter, as the Porters' family residence was named.

The first tea of the night was over and the fun begun. The room the corpse lay in was cleared of all unnecessary chairs and tables, and arrangements made to play "hide the brogue."

This play consisted in as many as wished to join the sport, seating themselves on the ground in a circle, their feet drawn somewhat in towards them, so that their knees reached up close to their chins. Then some one of the players volunteered to take the centre of the circle. The "brogue" was a tightly plaited piece of cloth, generally hard and heavy, but not too bulky—a common coarse towel rolled up does right well—and the fun was, to keep it going round the circle under the players' knees, each one acting and appearing as if he actually had it at any particular moment, and all keeping up a complete pandemonium by jointly shouting, "hide the brogue—hide the brogue—hide the brogue"; while he in the centre—the seeker—tried to find it with some one, ever and again receiving a capital thump from it from some player in one part of the circle while he was seeking for it in another. Then he would run to the suspicious side, only to be disappointed in the search, and to get another thump from the quarter he had left. Thus was the "seeker" kept looking for the "brogue" until he was fortunate enough to find it with some unfortunate player, who, in his turn, had to occupy the centre, and go through the same ordeal.

This fun was just beginning, the players were in the circle, and the brogue was in the seeker's hands, when Ned McCool and a comrade boy entered the kitchen, and passed on to the room where the play was about to begin.

"Come, McCool, play hide the brogue," was the cry which greeted him from the circle on the floor.

"No, no, boys, go on yourselves, your circle is complete; but I'll sit here beside the corpse, looking on."

It is probable that Ned might have joined in the fun but for the whisper he received from Miss Porter's old servant as he passed through the kitchen.

"Ned, don't let them get too noisy up there," she whispered; "there'd be no use in me tellin' them to behave themselves, but you can do it; and Ned, for the sake of my dear mistress, won't you do it?" He nodded affirmatively, and passed on to the room

The fun went on, several seekers had found the brogue, and were right heart glad to find it; the mirth was becoming loud and boisterous, when a sudden and complete hush fell instantaneously and simultaneously on the players, and all eyes turned in open amazement towards the bed. Ned was standing beside it towards its head, and pointing to the corpse, which was sitting upright, and glaring with the death stare in the extended orbs! A visible pallor overspread every countenance! No one could imagine what would happen next!

The corpse gave a jump in the bed; Ned gave a leap and a groan; the climax was reached; the players made a crashing, crushing rush for the door, and in the twinkling of an eye, as the saying is, the room was cleared of all save Ned and the corpse! The fugitives hardly looked round to see whether the deceased was following them or not. Poor Miss Porter! She was able to hunt more when dead than she ever could when living!

Strange as it is, it is nevertheless strictly true, that men the most courageous in the battle-field are the greatest cowards when matters of mystery come before them. Of the players at "hide the brogue" in Magheraporter that night, there were men whom not opposition the most deadly could make falter; and yet, at the apparition of a corpse sitting upright, they fled pell-mell from the spot! And how they laughed, those whom Ned called back, at the method which had been adopted in playing this practical joke.

Ned had been but a few minutes near the corpse when he noticed two peculiar lumps under the sheet that covered the body. Sifting closely, he found that there were two large stones there; and reasoning, in what proved to be correct, that they were placed on the body to keep it in a horizontal position—for he was aware of Miss Porter's habit of sitting on her "hunkers," and knew that she had died in that position, and that, consequently, her limbs would retain the position they held at her death; reasoning so, he concluded that if he could move these stones, and make the body leap, wouldn't he make a quick cessation of fun, and a rapid scattering of the players? Search-

ing his pockets, he found a piece of cord, which he fastened to the stone laid on the knees to straighten them, and held the other end in his hand partly under the covering and close by his side; then he tumbled the stone off the breast, and this caused the first panic among the players. When he found all the eyes gazing on the bed he pulled the cord, thus tossing off the stone on the knees, and causing the body to make a second sort of rebound, and this culminated the consternation, so that all fled !*

Ned and the old servant replaced Miss Porter again from her "hunkering" position, and when the players began to return, they were solemnly assured that the deceased would not revisit this world in person again, provided they conducted themselves peaceably and quietly, which they certainly did, nothing more noisy than a quiet conversation occurring during the remainder of this, the first night of the wake. But it was of that bantering kind, which funnily recounts the chit-chat of the whole country around, and which is valued in direct proportion as it bears on any of the company present.

"Eh, Ned, my boy," said Brian Malone, the big blacksmith; the great, good-natured Brian, whose laugh was always the cheeriest of the cheery, whose hand was always the readiest of the ready, whose joke was ever sure to propitiate or mollify. Poor big Brian! How well the writer of these pages remembers him, his big florid face, his large brawny hands, his massive broad chest, so often exposed at the warm work of the forge, his heartfelt laugh, and his fatal liking for the fatal whiskey. How well I remember to hear people remarking how Brian would surely bring himself to an untimely grave; and how well I remember the June evening on which the prophecy became true. He had been the wag and the at-hand man in the village and locality, and his death left a vacancy which has never since been filled. Ever ready to give his assistance when needed—and thousands of cases needed him; ever willing to help at night,

* A fact.

noon, or morn; never selfish nor greedy, his equal has not since been found around Moneyfin.

Brian's wife died before him, and of the two it was often remarked that they were never known to speak crossly to each other; she was an excellent housewife, and he as excellent a workman. His mirthful nature, however, must find vent somehow. Poor Peggy Malone, therefore, was astonished one evening when she saw Brian entering the kitchen accompanied by a sergeant of the soldiery and four men. She handed the visitors seats and down they sat; and there they remained for more than half-an-hour, chatting with Brian and Peggy, and gazing suspiciously at her. She couldn't know the meaning of such a visit at all; the soldiers began to look like a lot of fools; and Brian grew downcast, sad-looking, and silent. By and bye he winked to the men, who rose when he did and followed him out, to the unspeakable relief of his wife.

But what was the cause of the visit? Why, Brian was itching for a joke, so he went and asked down the sergeant "to yon wife of his, for he had no living with her." Sergeant Chisolm and four of the men went down, expecting to have a case for an asylum, but they soon saw the thing was only a joke. The sergeant felt like being offended, but the good-natured character of the blacksmith triumphed, and the sergeant had the laugh against him for his trouble.

On another occasion Brian resolved to give a great supper, and issued his invitations to the principal portions of his customers, missing none of the respectable ones. The night before the one intended for the supper, Brian went round all who had promised to attend, telling each one the names of the others who were to be there, and concluded his information by coolly saying to each individual as he reached the door going away: "You'll not forget to come early. Bring all your family with you. Oh, I forgot to tell you that you are to bring as much stuff as you'll use—hem!"

It was thus seen that the whole thing was a joke; in more modern parlance a "sell," and Brian's character rose in the

estimation of his friends. None was offended, for all knew the nature of the man.

At one time, Dr. Wallis was the physician of Brian's place, and once refused to leave an evening party to attend a young child of the blacksmith, that had been dangerously burned. Brian determined to give tit for tat; and watching his opportunity he found that the doctor was dining out one evening. Hastening to the house with post speed he sent in word that the rector's lady was just after having twins, and was dangerously ill, requesting the doctor's attendance immediately. Off from the dinner in hot haste rode Dr. Wallis, but when he reached the rectory, nothing was the matter, the rector and his wife were just at tea, no twins had been born, and the only satisfaction the doctor had for his journey was a few glasses of wine, and a laugh from the village folk for days and weeks after.

Such a man was Brian Malone, who asked Ned McCool in Castleporter: "Eh, Ned, my boy, you have heavy wather against you in your love coorses these times. Colonel Warburton will surely cut you out."

There was a something in the twinkling of Brian's eye as he spoke that, though it partly meant mirth, meant also sincerity, and Ned immediately questioned; "What do you mean, Brian?"

"How innocent he is, boys!" laughed the blacksmith; "as if he didn't know that the Colonel meets purty Mary the colleen every minnit he can. Ay, an' I'd wager my month's tobacco against a coloured sarjint's pay that he'll be with her this night in the glen, where she's to be sittin' up with the sick widow Mason."

"Are you telling the truth, Brian, are you sure?" demanded Ned.

"As sure as I am of takin' my mornin' in Jermy M'Laughlin's as soon as his shop opens. Didn't I see him myself the ither day takin' step for step wi her frae the widow's up to her own house, though the dear knows she was givin' him the could shoulder in the purest fashion."

All this was, to use the common expression, "so much Hindustanee" to Ned. He had heard nothing of it before. But he

heard enough now to astonish and madden him. Brian quietly, and in a low voice, told him the history of the Colonel's acquaintance with Mary; how, one summer's day in August last, during a storm of thunder and lightning, a gentleman was thrown from his horse and badly hurt near her residence; how she heard the groans, and going out, with the help of her little brother Johnny she carried the injured man into their cottage; how she bathed his head until he recovered, when he departed full of thankfulness and apparently of gratitude; how he returned the next day, and the next, and the next, and every succeeding day, giving the name of Stephen Fitzmorris, and always in civilian's dress; how he began to make presents and to speak softly to Mary, until he thought her heart was favourable to him, and then he began to show himself in his true colours to the benevolent girl, whom he now constantly persecuted with offers she loathed, and offerings she rejected.

"But how did you know all this, Brian?"

"From little Johnny, her brother, who tells me everything, because I have promised to make him a set of steel knuckles, for he wants to be a good fighter, and he always warns me not to tell. And I tell you, Ned," continued Brian, in his most earnest manner; "unless something be done soon, I'm as certain as that we are standin' here this night"—for the speakers had left the kitchen and were standing on the lawn under one of the trees—"that she will be stolen away by the deep villain, and you may never see her again, till you could do no good."

"If he'd dare lay a finger on her, I'd pursue him to the farthest corners of the earth for justice," exclaimed Ned.

"But how could you know that it was that devil did anything?"

"True, Brian; it is better not to let anything happen to her, than have to revenge it on him after—but I wonder Mary never told me of this?"

"You do, do you? No, no, I'd wonder she had told you. She kept her troubles to herself, not wishin' to vex you. An' then, you know she didn't know the rascality of the thief, for as

I told you, he was always in plain clothes when he visited her, and of course she couldn't know he was the Colonel, seein' she never be's in the town an' couldn't find him out that way."

"That's true, Brian, she is not often out. And from what you tell me, the only thing we can do is to show this Colonel that she has friends who can protect her. If we could only get him down to widow Mason's some night, we'd try and play him a trick or two that would maybe teach him better manners."

"I say, Ned;" asked Brian, after a silence between them of a couple of minutes; "did you ever hear anything about the Colonel's young life?"

Ned nodded negatively.

"Well, I know a thing or two about him that I heard on my tramp when I was away looking for work, an' if he carries on much more, I'll scatter a story about him that'll make him leave this country anyhow, as he had to fly from another place before."

During the latter part of this conversation, Brian and Ned had been moving away from Castleporter towards the town, but Ned now suddenly stopped, and gave three loud whistles on his fingers. An approaching step was immediately heard, and Peter Connolly, the comrade who had gone into the wake-house with Ned, joined them, and was in turn told by Ned what the blacksmith was after relating.

"And there's that other long-legged, lantern-jawed, crooked harpy, young Edwards, who's so intimate with the Colonel, and they help each other on in their worst devilment; I'm in for bringing him in for our treat to the other, and tipping him some of our cuffing too, to prevent him going squinting after Miss Darcus; or maybe we could get the one to play off against the other," said Peter, when he heard that the Colonel was to be taught a lesson.

"And by the hole in my stockin', an' that's a stirabout oath, I'm in for it too," said Brian; "an', Ned, you'll be doin' your foster-brother no harm if we can cool Edwards a little. Who

knows but we might get them both down to the glen the night, an' do a spice o' justice an' friendship at the same time. Say ay, Ned."

"Ay, to be sure, Brian; if we can only get that black nigger to help us. Let us see about him, and hurry, fer 'tis getting on to midnight now, I warrant."

While the trio hasten off to find the black, who had played the trick in the barn during the earlier portion of that same evening, let us see who the Edwards was, that Peter Connolly proposed should share in the punishment to be inflicted on Colonel Warburton.

He is the only child and heir of Sir Alexander Edwards, and had been absent from Rosedale for many years, having returned there only a few years before. He was almost six feet in height, but his emaciated appearance caused him to seem much taller. His legs were extremely long, while his body was short by some rule of inverse proportion. His neck followed the example of his legs, save that it was straight, while they seemed to be possessed of an inveterate hatred of the perpendicular and of each other; for the knees, while Edwards was walking, ever stayed at a more than ordinary distance. His legs were once described in mathematical or physiological phraseology by old Austin Bresland, a broken down philomath, as "forming a parallelogrammic quadrilateral, the opposite sides being represented by the *femora* and *tibia* of the alternate members." Such an external anomalous edifice was truly a correct reflection of the mental contrarities of the internal formation. Alternately brave and cowardly, honest and unscrupulous, straightforward and hypocritical, uncompromising and wavering, constant and unstable, Master Benjamin Edwards was as queer a specimen of mankind as the vagaries of nature launched forth. Among the undulations of this oddity's brain was a feeling regarding Miss Darous, composed of about equal portions of love and fear, the latter predominating in her presence, the former at all other times. Silent in her society, he was discontented and querulous when from her. If she smiled on anyone his jealousy was aroused. Hence, when Hubert Santley received her brightest smiles,

Master Benjamin hated him; and on more occasions than one Hubert felt, though harmlessly, the injuring hand of Edwards stretched before him to injure or annoy him. This was known by our trio from the wake, and to curb or extinguish this hate was he counted in for part of the punishment to be meted out on Colonel Warburton.

James Carlin, Mary's father—the Mary that Brian Malone mentioned to Ned—had been one of those respectable farmers who farmed about fifty acres of land at a fair rent. A hard-working honest man was James Carlin. He and his wife and children were so industrious as to be quoted all round the country as examples of honesty, economy, and unremitting diligence. The children were none of them full grown when misfortune befell the family, and in the old, old, well-known way, land, landlord, and bailiff. This latter was a villain of the blackest sort. His malignant mind could permit no one, where he wielded the sceptre of authority, to prosper. His smile was dangerous, more so than his frown; for the former lulled you, while the latter warned, and, consequently, prepared you. Not a tenant under the jurisdiction of Sam Hewlines but could have said of him as Juvenal once said of a Scotchman: "I never see our balliff, Sam Hewlines, smile, but I feel an involuntary emotion within myself to guard against mischief." Sam could neither read nor write, but he had a helpmate who could do both; and many blamed her more than him for the evils that came on them. James Carlin's good name and prosperity aroused Hewlines's jealousy; and a constant succession of falsehoods and exaggerations to the agent and landlord embittered them against the industrious farmer. His doom became certain. A series of petty annoyances began, first vexing and then angering James Carlin, but never a word said he in revenge; he only laboured the harder. At length one year his crops failed; his cattle died of a disease, every one of them save two or three young calves; one of his horses got a leg broken beforehand and had to be shot; and he himself took unwell. He petitioned for a decrease of rent, but no answer was vouchsafed to him. He fell back, in the course of two years, in

a year's arrears; down came the bailiff and seized land, furniture, farming implements, stock, and sold them out at a merely nominal value. So out went James Carlin and his happy family—now unhappy—from their old homestead; the apple-trees he had planted they were never more to enjoy; the fields they had cultivated with such care they would never again labour; the little harbour where they had so sweetly entwined the ivy and the woodbine would shelter them not again; nor would the little flower plot they had tended and watered with such solicitude ever more gladden them. Out they went into the "cold, wide world;" and the princely sum of fifteen pounds was the only compensation they received for the tenant-right of a farm of fifty acres. And this occurred in Ulster where, it is so often boasted, the tenant enjoys tenant-right!

"But that was years ago?" True, so it was. But is the same illimitable power not in the landlord's hands yet? Yes, just as strongly as ever, though, perhaps, not so outrageously exercised. No one can deny the right of the landlord to his rent. Let him even push the tenant for it. So far all is right and fair. But that one tenant should be refused a decrease of rent and ejected because he could not pay the high rate; while his successor would receive possession of the same farm at exactly half his rent—such *facts* are monstrous anomalies and oppressions which should be prevented by legal interference. And yet James Carlin saw his petition refused, and a decrease granted to his successor. But this is only another instance added to the many too well known, of the injustice of landlord to tenant, and of the harm bad bailiffs can do.*

Poor Carlin, a broken-hearted, prematurely old, man, soon started for America, but found his last home in the depths of the Atlantic, the ship he sailed in and all hands going down. His wife could not support this double loss: eviction from her home was hard enough; but the sudden bereavement from her husband, and he away among strangers where she could not even receive his parting breath, this was too much; her gentle

* This was written before Gladstone's Land Bill became law.

heart succumbed, and she, too, found an early grave; while on the shoulders of Mary, the eldest child, rested the heavy burden of supporting and directing her young brothers and sisters. Many an hour and year did the brave girl labour heavily and steadily. Many a time she felt half inclined to sit down and cry herself to death, the burden was so heavy, but she struggled on. There came a bright spot at length on the cloud of her life. She loved and was loved. But she would not leave her charge yet awhile; so she waited on, patient, steady, upright. And her lover, Ned M'Cool, though he often tried to coax her to be his wife, offering to take the charge of her burden on his own shoulders, honoured her for her dutiful attention; and he, too, waited on, hoping, sanguine, trusting.

CHAPTER V.

It was about midnight, probably a little after it, when Colonel Warburton and his men reached their barracks on their return from Rosedale House. Except the sentinels, the soldiers had retired to rest; and the Colonel was about to do the same, when his servant entered the room and handed him a letter. His brow brightened as he read, and with no small degree of interest and animation did he question his servant:—"Who brought this, Oliver?"

"It was a tall negro, Colonel, and he said that no reply was needed, for that you would know all about what was in the letter from the letter itself, and he couldn't delay, he said."

"And so I do, Oliver. Yes, so I do know all about it. Saddle Beauty at once, and be ready to attend me this time, for I have another ride before me to-night, and it is you must come with me."

"Will there be much sport, Colonel?"

"Some, Oliver; some that will be gratifying to your feelings and mine; we are going to meet that wench that I am after so long, that made such a capital nurse when I got the fall. Oliver, she would make you a capital wife."

"When you'd be done with her, Colonel, I suppose. Thank you, I'm not going to take your cast-offs just for the present."

"Why, damn it man, she'd have a fortune then, and she has none now. But we needn't quarrel on that point now—there'll be time enough after to-night for further arrangements;" and a look of malicious understanding passed between them, proving there was a secret of some sort, and that there was a stronger tie connecting them than usually exists between master and servant. Oliver backed out for the stable, and the Colonel again turned to the letter.

"To Currenell Warburton, if your onner wants to gane your

wishes, you wull start amedenly on resate of this letter to the little house in the glen below hether Hall, the person your onner wants to Get is sittin up there with a sick wimmun. Your onner and your onners Servant is enuff to go, one who noes your onners wishes."

"Hum! how am I to know this is no ruse! 'If your onner wants to gane your wishes;' by —, I do. She slighted me, the wench did, d—n her, and I swore revenge, and I'll have it. 'The house in the glen below hether Hall,'—I know it well. She has to go and act the nun, has she? I'll make it a dear night to her. 'One who noes your onners wishes,'—and who can that be? Young Edwards is the only one that knows, and he is too cowardly to excite my vengeance, and too much in my power besides. No, no, he daren't try to trick me. Then who can it be? 'One who noes my wishes,'—Hold! what if she did this herself, and it is all her planning! By heaven, that must be the way of the thing. I'll bring Oliver prepared, and he'll know my signal. She must think me a fool to fancy I was true when I offered to marry her. But I'll marry her if she wants to keep herself right, and when she gets that done she'll be satisfied. Ha, Oliver, returned so soon? Bring your special dress with you—the black one you know—and meet me at the gate with the horses."

While Colonel Warburton was thus muttering his thoughts, he had been throwing off the regimentals he had on when visiting Rosedale, and was donning other apparel. He now seemed a comfortable, thriving, dashing country squire. He and his servant set off at a gallop. Before following them on their midnight escapade, it may be appropriate to say something of this servant, Oliver Huxley.

He had been with the Colonel, when the latter joined the regiment in Dublin as Captain Warburton. Many wondered why such a man had been chosen as servant; that is, many, who were ignorant of Captain or Colonel Warburton's true nature, wondered; but those who came to be slightly intimate with the master and his servant wondered no longer, for the similarity of tastes, dispositions, and likings between the two became evident. The Colonel was once questioned by a brother officer on the matter, and

answered that he "wanted a giant to accompany him to Ireland, a land, he was told, of giants, savages, and murderers." As the questioner was an Englishman, the answer was satisfactory.

The fact was that Oliver had been chosen solely because of his immense size and strength, and of his innate brutality and obsequiousness. To his superiors he was a fawning, cringing knave; while to his fellow-soldiers, he was an insolent, overbearing, villainous giant, being fully six feet seven inches in height and proportionately stoutly built. His hands and arms were of a fearful size and length; and so famous was his character as to his habit of knocking down every man he struck, that he was soon known among the peasantry around Moneyfin as "The Clinker." Nor was the *sobriquet* confined to the peasantry alone; it got in among the soldiers, and many a time Oliver found the nickname written up upon some prominent part of the barrack wall. He was not long earning a name of fear among his comrades, and of dislike among the peasantry for what they considered his nasty and disgusting habits, and for his brutality. He was passionately fond of frogs; and it was a common custom of his when disengaged to go out hunting for them among the drains and meadows near the town. On one of these frog-hunting researches, he and his comrade saw a fine one lying on the very brink of a large pool. "Damn your eyes, Wat," shouted the Clinker to his companion; "steek your sword through the hanimal's tail, or we'll miss a fine gobble."

The expression got reported somehow through the country, and one morning early, in about a week afterwards, a number of dead frogs were found hanging on the large gate of the barracks, with a small wooden sword stuck through each! A piece of paper was also attached, on which was written, in full bold characters: "FOR THE CLINKER'S BREAKFAST." It so happened that a detachment of the men were going out that morning, and among them was the Clinker. When the gate was opened, and the string of dead amphibia met their eyes, and when the writing was read, a burst of laughter pealed on the morning air. The Clinker could not believe it. *Dare* anyone play such a trick on him! If he only had a grip of the person who hung the frogs

up there! Whoever the contriver was he was not there just then, so with a howl of execration and a scowl of annihilation at his fellow-soldiers for their mirth, he tore down the string, and the detachment proceeded.

In a few days the incident was forgotten, and would likely have remained so, had the Clinker not been heard, in a public-house, threatening retaliation for the trick. A little waiter told him, "Better to be in England again." He grabbed at the young monkey, but caught the air, and continued his revengeful conversation. He was out on a march, one rather dirty day, with the men a few days afterwards. They had proceeded but a short distance from the barracks, having just cleared the town, when an immense finger-post attracted their attention, which was riveted on the thing the more closely as the like had never been seen there before. On a nearer approach, the soldiers saw that it was a large door fastened to a pole stuck upright in the street. The door was painted white, and on it in large red letters was another cut at the Clinker. The writing was as follows:—

HO! HO! HO!
DID! DID! DID!
THE! THE! THE!
CLINKER! CLINKER!
GET! GET! GET!
HIS! HIS! HIS!
BREAKFAST! BREAKFAST!
OF! OF! OF! OF! OF!
FROGS! FROGS! FROGS!

No pen could adequately describe the rage and fury of the Clinker when he saw this. His eyes glared, and the veins swelled out in his neck, hands, and face, like ropes. So fearful-looking was he that not a sound arose from the men. They stood silent as Egyptian mummies while the terrible convulsions of their companion were going on. Not even the lieutenant in charge dared to interfere.

At length with a bound like a lion, the enraged Clinker sprang at the hated object. The impetus was so powerful, and the stability of the post so slight, that instead of his clasping it to

pull it up, he found himself stretched on the ground. Instead of being firmly fixed, the post was just only sufficiently so to support it; so that when the man dashed himself against it with such terrific force, it fell with a grand crash, he falling prostrate along with it. When he rose, his face and breast were covered with blood. But that was not all. The post was a hollow square, and had had some thirty or forty living frogs put into it. When the Clinker got looking about him, therefore, he found the ground covered with the leaping amphibia. Then away he went, dancing, prancing, cursing, trampling, foaming, leaping, crashing, crushing, smashing, in a war dance around the prostrate post, every leap being death to a frog, and every death accompanied by a shocking anathema. At length, when not a movement was visible among the animals, every one of them being trampled to death, the wild madness ceased, the Clinker cooled down, and the soldiers, silent, cowed, and awe-struck at the paroxysms of their companion, proceeded on their duty.

Of Colonel Warburton, then, and his servant, Oliver Huxtle, may it not be truly said, "Like man, like master," nor would the apothegm be falsely applied. It were hard to decide which were the greatest villain, master or servant? But since education should have had a civilising, beneficial effect on the Colonel, who had really received a very fair education, but who, instead of improving was actually retrograding, the palm for villany should be assigned to him and not to the ignorant and brutal Clinker.

Such the two men now riding to widow Mason's house in the glen to encompass the destruction of the peasant girl, Mary Carlin.

Which side will win, she, with her innate purity and goodness, or they, with their arts of devilment and destruction?

We shall see.

But let a glance first be taken into widow Mason's lonely cabin, that midnight morning, ere the Co'nel and his servant arrive. Before a small fire, on a small stool, in a small kitchen, with a small bit of a rushlight giving an uncertain glimmering around the apartment, sits the solitary watcher, Mary Carlin,

motionless, her head resting on her hands as if sleep had overpowered her unawares. A poor dresser stood against the wall behind, near the room door; one or two chairs, two stools, a form, a pot, and a few other indispensable articles of household use, were all else the apartment contained, save the miserable pallet on which the uneasy sufferer has been moaning and tossing all the night. And who is this poor invalid? Her history is a short but a curious one.

Old Betty Mason, as she lies in the agonies of death on that poor bed, is near sixty years of age. She had come through more in her time than generally falls to the lot of mortals. She had been ill unto death some twenty-two years before; yes, even unto death. For more than thirty-three hours had she remained in the death trance. All thought she was dead. When she recovered from her comatose state, which she did on the morning she was to be interred, and as she was lying in her coffin shrouded and dressed for the grave, she gave a most extraordinary relation of the wonderful sights which she had witnessed in the other world, and especially of some persons she had known in this life, but who had long since been in eternity. How some of them were in torments of fearful punishment; while some, though suffering intensely, were enduring less degrees of torture. And how some were enjoying ineffable happiness in the world of bliss.

Many there were who discredited her veracity, arguing that she drew upon her imagination for the description she gave; while there were many who believed her: but of one thing there could be no doubt—she changed her religion, and remained ever after a firm adherent of the creed she adopted, and became and continued a good reformed Christian besides. Some may sneer at the incident and mock at it; many may try to explain old Betty's conversion from natural causes; but incredulous or believing as you, dear reader, may be, the circumstance is true, and may be vouched for by many now living, who yet remember this far, far more than a "nine days' wonder."

The poor widow was again toppling over her grave, and was dependent solely on the generosity and charity of her neighbours

for the kindnesses and support she was receiving. Amongst the generous donors none was more charitable than Mary Carlin. But it was not alone what her hand gave that made Mary so pre-eminently useful to Betty. There was something so unostentatiously kind and sweet, her hands, her face, her very breath, that sweet smile, that gentle fixing of the clothes, that cooling refreshing drink—a something so pure, so true, so soothing about Mary, that Betty never felt the same ease when any other watcher sat with her.

And there she sits that night again, and the fire twinkled lower, and the candle glimmered more indistinct, and the night wore on towards morning. And she sat on, thinking of the grim past, grim and dark but for the one sweet bright spot, and, but for that one spot, the grimmer and darker present. How long she had thus remained she knew not, for the invalid was dozing, and Mary seemed forgetful of time. She was suddenly aroused to consciousness by a gentle, but distinct "low tapping at the bolted door." She rose, unbolted and opened the door, looked out, but saw no one. Looking closer, she discerned a tall figure standing against the side-wall.

"Were you rapping?" she questioned.

"Is it Mary Carlin dat asks me?" questioned the stranger in reply, advancing from his position in the darkness into the light as it shone through the open doorway.

"Oh, darkey, is it you that's there?" asked Mary.

It was our friend, the darkey of the trumpet scene. He gave Mary some information which startled her a good deal, and against which she seemed to be arguing, but her assent to which the negro at length contrived to gain, when he departed, leaving her alone again. She returned to the kitchen, carefully bolting the door, lit a new rushlight, sat down on the little stool again after giving widow Mason's lips a little cooling draught, and silence once more fell around.

Not more than ten minutes had elapsed when the sound of horses' hoofs was heard, as if approaching the cabin. The noise grew more distinct, and then more cautious, and then ceased entirely. And the next thing that startled the lonely

watcher was the noise as of some persons feeling for the latch of the door. This, too, ceased, and a knocking at the little window followed, which was accompanied or rather succeeded by a voice which, in a half plaintive tone, asked; "Can we have a drink for man and horse?"

Mary rose, and for a little something seemed to trouble her, as if an indistinct glimpse of a painful ordeal had come before her; she pressed her chest with her two hands, as if to gather her energies and still the painful pulsations of her heart, and then with a courage renewed and strengthened by the pause, she went forward and opened the door.

A muffled figure entered, following her up to the fire, whither she had gone for the light.

"Mr. Fitzmorris! you here!" ejaculated Mary, quite frightened.

"Yes, Mary, I am here. I heard you were watching by the sick widow, and I came. Am I unwelcome?"

"You know you are unwelcome! You know I hate you! You know I do not want your company! Why do you force yourself on me? I told you before to think of some other victim, for that the hour that would see me in your hated power, would be the hour of my death. Go, if you have a spark of kindness in your heart—if you are not utterly dead to every feeling of humanity, go. Go, I say! Why will you torment me with your presence.

What a sublime picture of feminine beauty and purity was Mary Carlin, as she uttered these scathing sentences! Flushed with her earnestness, and excited beyond ordinary, she was the true personification of female majesty and determination. Handsome she naturally was, and fair—the fair beautiful type of the fair and beautiful Irish maiden—but there was something supernatural about her, as her denunciations fell fast and fierce on the libertine before her. Her right hand pointing towards the door; the deep blue eyes flashing scintillations of derision and defiance; the open marble brow and fair cheeks veined with the blood that coursed so unusually swiftly through them; and the lips curved to sternest, proudest resolve and courage—these

all served but to increase the passion of the libidinous man before her. His eyes sparkled with intense emotion as he felt the spirited girl thus defying him. Ere she had concluded her defiant answer, his manner, however, became entirely changed; a deep humility succeeding his previous haughtiness; his face wore an expression of meekness, and when he spoke his voice sounded soft and sorrowful.

"I regret most truly, Miss Carlin, that my presence wounds you so deeply. I must admit that my conduct on past occasions has been wrong, very wrong; but I have come here to-night prepared and determined to make you all the reparation in my power. From this you may judge the state of my mind, the sincerity of my intentions towards you."

"And what reparation are you prepared to offer, Mr. Fitzmorris, it is no harm to ask, though I am not saying whether I shall accept it or not?"

"The greatest and most honest in my power, or in that of any man, to the lady he loves with all the ardour of a warm nature, and all the earnestness he can command—marriage."

"When and where?"

"At this moment, and in this place."

"And am I to understand, sir, that you are truly honest in your offer, and that it is no sham you are prepared to perpetrate?"

"Of that you can judge yourself, Miss Carlin; the clergyman is at the door, and you can question him as to his power and ordination."

"Then if you are really sincere, Mr. Fitzmorris, why come at such an unusual time, and to such an unusual place? Why not come in open broad daylight, and you can then have my answer? Why not come to-morrow?"

"Because only late this evening I received a summons to go to-morrow morning early to London; and I wish before I leave to make sure of my wife. Believe me, Miss Carlin, Mary, believe me, I am only following the truest promptings of my heart. Try and think I am sincere; try and forget the past, except as much of it as speaks of my affection for you. Say you

forgive me; say you will love me; say you will be mine;” and the speaker advanced to take her hand as he spoke. She retreated a little, was silent for a few seconds, and then said:—

“Remain here for a quarter of an hour, Mr. Fitzmorris, till I go for a few friends to witness the ceremony;” and she was moving out as she spoke.

“Doubting still, I see! Can you not trust me?” and he placed himself between her and the door.

“I thought, sir, you were not sincere, and now I’m certain of it!”

“How can you reason in that way?” he demanded.

“If you were honest, you would never ask to wed me here; here, in a poor lonely cabin; here, beside death; here, with no friend to stand beside me; here, with no witness to our marriage; here, in my every day dress; here, away from my brothers and sisters—no, Mr. Fitzmorris, if you were a gentleman you would never ask to do so. And now that you have thus asked; now that you have forgotten the instincts of humanity; now that you have thus outraged feminine feelings, hear my answer”—she paused, not decided, seemingly, what to say; not knowing whether she could longer equivocate with safety or not; not knowing whether her arrangement with the darkey would be properly and speedily enough carried out; but her national purity and fire predominated; to the man before her, panting and bursting with anxiety for a favourable reply, she answered—“by night or by day, lonely or surrounded by all my friends, in cabin or cathedral, I shall never, never, never, be your wife, Mr. Fitzmorris, and that’s my firm decision.”

“Then hear me, madam. As you have given your ‘firm decision,’ as you call it, I’ll let you have mine. By heaven and the powers of hell, you shall be mine in spite of yourself, and this very night too. You shall rue the hour you defied me. Now a truce to mockery, and approach reality. Come, maiden, my arms shall protect you, while my brave horse waiting outside will bear us to safety and to freedom, where we will get enjoying ourselves not annoyed by any troublesome intruder;” and he stepped towards her, following her as she retreated to the wall

and stood at defiant bay. He was about to reach out his hand to seize her, when a step sounded behind him, and he was rudely addressed by "Turn, villain, and find a meeter opponent than a defenceless girl," while a firm grasp on his shoulder made him quickly turn to oppose this daring intruder. Fiercely he swung himself round, but seeing his assailant, he calmed down and ejaculated:—

"How's this? Master Edwards?"

"Yes, 'Master Edwards.' I am here to defend this lady against your vile and treacherous attack," answered the newcomer.

"What lady, Edwards? I fear much you are mistaken."

It was then that Master Benjamin looked for the first time towards the female, and with a start of surprise he ejaculated: "This is not Miss Darcus!"

"Ho, ho, is it there the wind lies? Hear me, Edwards, for a little;" and they moved to the outside of the cabin. Here they chatted for a few seconds, and when they returned Mr. Fitzmorris continued:—"My friend has arrived most opportunely, Miss Carlin, and will lend me his assistance in conveying you to the residence I have prepared for us to spend the honeymoon in."

Both the gentlemen—if it [is not a libel on] society to so denominate them—advanced towards Mary, and attempted to seize her. Ere their hands could touch her, and before she raised a cry for help, a tall, dark figure glided silently into the kitchen; and with two strokes, one to the right and the other to the left, the two midnight abductors lay senseless on the floor! The new arrival produced some cords, tied the prostrate villains securely, and gained the upright position, showing the symmetrical and herculean form of the negro.

But how happened it that Master Benjamin Edwards presented himself at widow Mason's that particular hour of the morning?

CHAPTER VI.

Colonel Warburton and his men had left Rosedale but a few minutes when a decrepit old man hobbled up to the mansion, and enquired for Master Benjamin. When the young heir heard that there was a visiter who anxiously and pressingly desired to see him, he ordered him to be sent up to his own private sitting-room. He had two reasons for this. He did not wish to risk an interruption from Sir Alexander or any of the servants; and he wished to choose his own time and convenience to examine the messenger fully as to his errand, whatever that might be. He heard a cracking cough, and an old man immediately after hobbled into the apartment. Wrinkled and dirty and brown and unshaven as the old man was, he was undoubtedly the remains of great strength and symmetry. Like some gigantic oak, whose gnarled branches and immense trunk, now withered and prostrate, attested the erewhile grandeur of the king of the forest, so the ruined remains of Master Benjamin's visiter bore incontestible evidence of his past herculean proportions and prowess.

"Will your honour let me have a chair?" were his first words to young Edwards; "I'm racked intirely with these rheumatic pains, and this cough and them stairs has teetotally tuk the breth from me."

And to the infinite disgust of Master Benjamin, a long-continued round of coughing and moaning and sighing and groaning seized the old cripple.

"You do seem much afflicted, old man; would a glass of brandy be of any assistance to you?"

From what has been said already of Master Benjamin, his peculiarities and anomalies, it will be concluded that he would sometimes have fits of kindness and charity. He was in one

of them when he offered the brandy to the old man, nor was the latter slow in accepting his proffered offer.

"Orrah, then, your honour, it wud. Musha long life attind you, and may ivery success you deserve be yere lot. Och, och, but the time woz when I'd a thocht little o' a wheen miles o' a journey like this for a freen'; but age, yere honour, age an' bad-keeping id destroy the best o' us."

And another fit of groaning and coughing followed.

"Here then, old man, is a little brandy. Drink it, and while you are sipping it over, you will tell your business with me, for I wish to get to bed."

"Indeed then, Masther Benjamin, I think you'll not go an inch to bed this night, whin you hear what I've come to tell you about. But indeed, your honour, I don't know if you'll be plazed wi' me or no?"

"Oh, don't be afraid. Go on, and tell me your business. Why should I be displeased with you? Go on—go on."

"Och, then, I hardly know how to go on—I wish yere honour could guess."

"Pshaw, fool, how could I guess your errand? But tell me your name, you have not told me that yet."

"Thrus enough, yere honour, how could you guess my errand?" said the old man, coolly unheeding Master Ben's remark about his name; "Well, I came about a female freen' o' yours—you can guess who I mane—Heather Hall, you know?" and the speaker peered up into the other's eyes with a sly glance of fun and meaning.

"Do you refer to Miss Darcus?"

"Musha, then, how I knew yere honour would light upon *her*! Is she not the handsome young lady?" questioned the old man in turn, without directly answering the previous query.

"And what about that young lady, who stands so high in your estimation, old man?"

"Och, yere honour, I'd lake to know who doesn't think high o' her—she's the darling young lady anyway. What about her, ye wor axing. Oh, not a much. But yere honour knows the wee glen below Heather Hall?"

Edwards nodded in the affirmative.

"An' the wee cottage o' the widow woman there?"

Again a nod of assent.

"Well, yere honour, the widow's sick, an' there's somebody sittin' up wi' her, an' I thocht you might lake to know o' it, as somebody might be comin' home about daylight, an' might lake company."

"Why, fellow, what do you want me to do?"

"Oh, nethin', nothin', yere honour, but I woz thinkin' somebody might be laking a protector these troublesome times, an' it so early in the mornin'. But, avilish, since you don't care I'll go my ways again, and nobody will be nothin' the wiser."

"Easy, now, my good man; I didn't say I was careless, did I?"

There was a pause after this, the silence unbroken only by the loud breathing of the asthmatic old man, on whom there came another fit of coughing and spitting and moaning. This ever, Master Benjamin continued:—"On the contrary, my good man, instead of being careless, here are a couple of guineas to show you how thankful I am; and I'll give you as many more the next time I meet you, if I find you told me the truth."

"The truth! Och, then, yere honour's toe dasent to doubt me! I didn't come to tell you for money at all, so I didn't."

"Never mind, never mind. Buy yourself a couple of bottles of brandy with it. I give it to you freely. And now come along—I'm ready—but stay, you haven't told me your name yet?"

"Well, now, yere honour, I'd a rayther ye hadn't axed me my name, for I thocht ye'd a trusted onny messenger o' hers, ye know."

"So I would, if I were certain you were her messenger. And 'tis only just for my own satisfaction I want to know, that I may be able to reward you well enough for your trouble to-night. Yes—yes—I must know your name before I leave the room. What is it?"

"Deed, yere honour, I have no notion o' withholdin' my name from ye, an' maybe, whin ye hear it, ye'll no' rimimber it. My name is"—but another severe fit of coughing here occurred, which lasted for many seconds, ay, two or three minutes, necessitating the old soul to take a chair for support, where he leant his head on his hand, as if recovering breath. "My name," he continued, "is Shawn-More-a-Mac-a-Taghlin! my father was Roger Beg-a-Mac-a-Taghlin; an' I'm livin' where he lived in the bog above there, called Meenmorebegamoney—och—och—ech—this—this—rackin' pain in my back and chist!"

"Mac-a-Taghlin! What a confounded name that is! Pray, you surely don't often write that name?"

"No, no, yere honour, my father, poor Roger Beg-a-Mac-a-Taghlin, was niver able to give iz much schoolin'. But if ye'd rather, Masther Benajamin, ye may call me John Houston, or better, wee John Houston, for that's what's meent by Shawn-Beg-a-Mac-a-Taghlin. *Shawn*, yere honour, is the Irish for John, and *beg* means wee, and *Mac-a-Taghlin* has been brought into Houston, for they say that's the manin' o' our name in Irish.

"By the god of fools, they were sensible people that gave you the name of John Beg; methinks, you should rather have been called John Big."

"That's what monny a wan saiz, yere honour; bit ye see, my father was Roger Beg, an' my uncle was Thady More, an' my ould brother was Owen Baan, or white Owen; an' my nixt brother was Brian Dhu, or black Brian, an' my granfather was Charley Buoy, or yellow Charley, an' a gran'-uncle o' mine was called Shawn Glass, or green John, an' another uncle was nicknamed Paddy Leav, or Paddy Hand, for he had only wan han', and Leav, yere honour, spelt l-a-m-h, is the Irish for han'; and then my mother——"

"Never mind, never mind any more. I suppose if I let you go into your feminine relations we might stay here till morning. Come, let us away, John Houston, wee John Houston."

And the strangely assorted pair descended the stairs, Master Benjamin only waiting to snatch an overcoat as he passed

through the hall. They took their way towards the cottage in the glen, but the old man was so weak that he was unable to go the whole way, and begged his companion to hurry on, lest their journey would turn out fruitless. Master Ben refused; but when the old man sat down breathless and weary on the roadside fence, averring that he could proceed not a single step further, there was nothing for it but for Edwards to trudge on alone. This he did, and arrived, as already described, at widow Mason's cabin, where we left him and Colonel Warburton lying senseless on the floor, bound by the negro, who was standing over them. It will be remembered, however, that Mary Carlin did not know who Mr. Fitzmorris really was, thinking him just what he represented himself to be, a thriving country gentleman.

When he and Master Benjamin recovered their consciousness and their power of vision, the only person they saw was a gigantic negro standing beside them.

"What means this outrage, you black devil?" were the first words that gurgled forth from the throat of Mr. Fitzmorris, or Colonel Warburton. By his real name, then, let him be mentioned in future till "FINIS" be reached.

"By the powers of darkness, you'll suffer for this before long, you image of Satan, you;" was the opening attack of Master Benjamin.

At this moment two men, closely masked, entered the cabin, carrying some large body between them, which they placed on the floor, between the two already there.

It was the Clinker!

He had been left by his master to take charge of the horses while the scene inside was going on. Sitting on his own animal, he watched the movements of those inside; then the entrance of Master Benjamin attracted his attention; and the next thing that surprised him was to find his arms seized by some one from behind. He depended so much on his immense strength that he refrained from shouting for help, but he was astonished to find that he had met his match, nay, more than his match; for, despite his most strenuous struggles, he was pulled from his horse, bound and gagged, and carried a few yards to the side of

the cabin, where he was thrown as if he were a lump of a log. He heard the murmur of voices from the inside, then a couple of shocks, and then he found himself silently lifted from his lair, and carried into the house, where he was placed, as has been said, on the floor between his master and Master Benjamin. But what was his surprise to find those two lying bound and helpless like himself! To see him and them checkmated at such a time and by so few! It was maddening, outrageous, terrible, fearful, insufferable—dictionaries are insufficient to supply words to picture the Clinker's feelings and passions! He was the only one gagged; consequently he could not speak; but in the demoniac glare of his eyes sparkled volumes of terrible, eternal, infinite retaliation!

View the tableau, reader mine.

Three men, bound, lying writhing, struggling, twisting, foaming, glaring, on the floor.

Three men, two masked, the other a negro, standing silently, yet very watchful, over them.

A woman on a miserable pallet, in the last agonies of her second death.

Mary Carlin peeping up from the room, and wishing that it was all over; determined that no injury should happen in her presence to the three unfortunate prisoners.

The faint light of the rushlight, and the fainter glimmering of the fire, spreading an indistinct flickering over all.

The Colonel broke the silence.

"Devils or men, why this silent mockery or mummary?"

Master Benjamin said not a syllable.

One of the masked men spoke.

"Colonel Warburton, otherwise Mr. Fitzmorris, and you, Master Benjamin Edwards, listen. Ye are bound, and in our power. There is one condition on which each of you may get away from our hands without disgrace.

He ceased. Mary muttered to herself in the room; "Colonel Warburton, otherwise Mr. Fitzmorris! Colonel Warburton, otherwise Mr. Fitzmorris!" For the first time she then knew

that her visiter was a pretender, and she shuddered at the fate that was nearly being hers.

The bound men remained silent, seemingly deaf to the conditions left before them. The negro took up the words of his masked companion.

"De cenditions is, Kurnel, dat you sign a paper, pledging yourself neber gane to molest Miss Mary Carlin, on de pain ob borbeiting your commishun. And you, Mass Bendamin Edward, will likewise, also, sign anoder paper, gibing up all pretenshuns to de hand ob Miss Annie Darcus. Dis am to show you," and the speaker particularly addressed the Colonel; "dat dough de object ob your lubbing desires am in de lower position dan you am, dat she hab many, many friends who am able and willing to purtect her, and can punish dose who will dry do ham her."

Again there was silence in the cabin, save for the choking breathing of those on the floor. The negro waiting for an answer for a little, and receiving none, he continued, this time addressing one of his two companions:—"Fetch de hosses do de door. Now, genelman," and he turned to his prisoners; "you hab until de hosses come to de door to decide tween honour and freedom, or billainy and exposure."

A dreadful blasphemy and imprecation was the Colonel's reply. Master Benjamin continued silent.

"Will you choose, gentlemen?" asked the negro's remaining companion.

Still no reply from Edwards, while Warburton ejaculated another terrific oath. The horses just then reached the door. Not a word more passed. The negro produced two strips of cloth, and firmly gagged the two prisoners not already gagged. The Colonel rebelled his very utmost, while his companion kept mute and motionless. The former was lifted, carried to the door, and tied on his horse's back. The Clinker was similarly fastened on his charger. Then the two masked men caught up Master Benjamin, and carrying him between them, the negro leading the two horses after having said a few words at parting to Mary, the strange cavalcade moved off from the widow's cabin at a good smart walk.

The curious *cortege*, headed and led by the negro, proceeded right rapidly, till they neared the barracks of Moneyfin. Here they stopped, and Master Benjamin was laid on the ground, while one of the two that carried him ran off quickly and on tip-toe, but returned almost immediately bearing a ladder, which he placed against the barrack wall, contiguous to the entrance gate. This done, the negro loosened the cords that had been tying the Colonel on the horse's back, lifted him off, carried him up the ladder, and deposited him on his back on the summit of the barrack wall, fifteen feet high. A similar position was given to Master Benjamin, who was so fixed—ignominious situation for a baronet's son and heir—that his feet just touched the Colonel's head. Then the Clinker came in for a like attention, being fixed at the Colonel's feet—proper position, certainly, for master and servant!

A piece of paper was then pinned to the breast of each of the three men, so lying on the summit of a wall, barely broad enough for them to preserve their balance, while they well knew that the least movement on their part might precipitate them either on the flagged yard inside or the hard pavement without. And there they lay, watching the few stars that twinkled, mockingly as they thought, down on them from the vault above. The horses were cast loose, and the three avengers departed, just as the first streaks of the coming day were noticeable in the east.

No life seemed in the three men thus so dangerously located. No motion was made by any of them. Immobile as rocks, the only life-sign among them was in the eyes. Rolling, gleaming, glaring, piercing, sparkling, the scintillating orbs were ever restless, never passive. Day gradually brightened the objects around, but there came no brightening, no mitigation, no relief to the human wallflowers, if the expression is allowable. The distant hills of Croghry and Barnesmore, and the long ranges of Tyrowen rose up in dim, and then in distinct, outline; but no sound of relief broke the stillness—the regular beat of the sentinel on duty being the only sign of life near.

The Colonel began to brighten up a little, for he knew that the hour for relief of guard was nigh, and he had hopes for freedom

then. And even as he so felt, he heard the marching of the relief guard, and then resolutions of revenge came prominently up before him. But even then, his hopes were dashed, for suddenly a loud "Halt" rang through the morning air. The soldiers came to a dead stand, and the inhabitants of the wall grew fearful again. A thrill came over them, a thrilling as of some dread indefinite danger, a fear as of some dire final catastrophe. Nor was this feeling lessened, when again the voice from the inside gave the next command.

"Robbers on the wall! Prepare to fire!"

The Colonel felt an uneasy palpitation around his heart. His own stern orders were about to recoil with dreadful and ignoble retaliation on himself. He had issued his fiat some months before:—"All intruders overnight to be shot without parley." He had even, on one occasion, sharply and publicly reprimanded the junior lieutenant for showing mercy and a kindness to a poor weary woman who had sought the shelter of the porches of the gate during a snow-storm, and which shelter it was that probably saved the unfortunate woman's life. This the Colonel knew, but his heart was too hard, too unfeeling, too uncharitable, to give credit to another for such a necessary and merciful act.

Now as he lay on that bare wall, he thought of his past harshness and misdeeds; on the murder of that young maiden on that hill-side many, many years ago and the consequent curse; he thought, too, of Ellen O'Ronan; and he particularly thought of Mary Carlin, her to win whom he had perilled himself, and lost. And yet he mentally vowed that she would yet meet a reward for this punishment she had permitted him to endure, without interfering to save him from such ignominy.

"Steady!"

It was but a deeper quivering through the limbs, a more distinct, nearer realization of the approaching doom, a hazy glimmering about the eternity so near, a kind of farwell impulse regarding earth—it was but these acuter feelings that marked the hearing of the above awful word. But more awful was the next.

"Present!"

The Colonel and his companions heard the levelling of the muskets, *felt* that the soldiers were taking aim though they could not *see* them, and were quivering with the flying bullets, as they in their fear and their fancy imagined, passing through them. The Clicker thought of his strength and of how sadly his end was to be; Master Benjamin thought of Miss Darcus and actually smiled, a gleam of joy diffusing itself over his countenance even in the agonies of death; and Colonel Warburton would never again review his men in the parade-ground of Moneyfin barracks.

CHAPTER VII.

To those who have ever been at an Irish wake, a description of the events thereat might be tiresome from the general similarity that frequently exists among such meetings. And yet there is a dissimilarity, too. The hero, or heroes, or clown, or butt, that may be at one wake in one locality, are rarely at those in another. And so, too, though the plays or pastimes may be fundamentally the same, yet there are so many variations often introduced, and so many additional jokes perpetrated, that the amusements may seem totally different.

The surprise at Castleporter, when the corpse returned again to *terra firma*, was too great and too permanent for the customary boisterous fun to be continued at; so the people settled quietly down to story-telling. Among those present there was no person more remarkable in his way than the old pedagogue mentioned earlier as giving the scientific description of the legs of Master Benjamin Edwards—Austin Bresland. He was pedantic, in love with polysyllables.

Between Mr. Bresland and Owen Slevin there existed a sort of antagonism, not unfriendly, but rather amusing, each usually vying with the other as to which could win and wear the laurels of conversational controversy in the other's presence. Owen went on the tack of always interrupting the pedagogue, when the latter was seemingly most interested and most interesting; while the retired schoolmaster ever endeavoured to silence Owen by the downright superabundance of illimitable polysyllables, which seemed to flow from his labial organs unhastened or unsought for by any portion of his own inclination. Owen went on the rollicking, funny style, but every utterance of his opponent appeared firm and solid and severe as possible; and the more jovial Owen became the other grew the more learned and stern.

Owen seemed to be a sort of acknowledged leader at wakes and such gatherings. On him, when present, usually was left the pleasurable task of originating and supporting the conversation. So when the wake people at Castleporter settled down into their seats for the night, and the conversation seemingly hard to start, Owen began the fun by addressing his opponent with his invariable leading query, one, too, that invariably opened a fund of amusement.

"Come, Mr. Bresland, tell us the greatest wonder ever you saw?"

Owen's intention was to take the old man by surprise, and so get the better of him, but he was disappointed.

"The most extraordinary phenomenon I ever witnessed," was the reply; "was seeing a human biped with prudence enough to be silent at the suitable moment, and judgment enough to speak at the opportune one. Such a wonder I never beheld but once, and assuredly, sir, you are not he."

"Ha, Owen boy, you got it there!" was the laughing exclamation which succeeded Bresland's hit. Owen looked round good-humouredly, and winking, as much as to say, "All right, boys, I'll have my turn of the laugh," he again questioned.

"That was a wonder surely, Mr. Bresland. And now will you tell us what's the greatest sign of good sense you know of, you're so sensible?"

"Exactly the same response repeated, Mr. Slevin; to be silent in season, to speak in season," coolly responded Mr. Bresland.

"You've got it again, Owen!" was the cry now. And again Owen good-humouredly winked as he looked round.

"You are good the night, Mr. Bresland," continued Owen, "so pray tell us what a fool is."

"What a fool is!" Why, you infinitesimal atom of terrestrial sensibleness, cast thine ocular orbs of intellectual utility upon thine own structure, both mental and physical, and thou beholdest the most veracious image of terrene idiocy the most fertile fancy could imagine."

There was more of surprise than of fun in the laugh that followed Mr. Bresland's application to Owen himself of the reply.

Few of these present understood the language, and few also fathomed the old schoolmaster's sly hit at his tormentor. Owen himself dropped the badinage for the time, and called on some one—"Come, boys, let us have a story."

"Ay, Owen, ye're goin' to let Mr. Bresland alone for a wee now. He's too many for you."

"There's a good time coming, boys," replied Owen, "but get on with a story. Come John Doherty, you're great at telling yarns—spin us a spindle or two now."

"Weel, 'deed Owen, am in nae great humour o' tellin' ye onny tales the nicht, ayfter the scar a got last nicht."

"What was that, John? What woz it? Tell ix it," were the cries that resounded from all parts of the apartment.

"'Deed its noa verry lang, sae a needn't keep ye glowring about it. A woz up in Qeebrack last night wi my cousin Neddy whar he woz stillin; an we had got the runnin' finished jist about an hoor ayfter day brake. An' Neddy brocht in a four ghallon keg intae the kitchen, an' set it doon an the fhure, an' we a' set doon roon it, tae hae a drap ayfter the nicht's work. Ay, there woz Nancy Gillespie an' her brither Bill, an' Peggy an' Biddy Bogan, an' Hughey Broadley, and Paddy Kelly, an' oor Neddy an' his wife, an' myself. Weel, Hughey Broadley jist chaenced tae step tae the daur, an' comes in againe amedenly wi' the cry that the sojers are comin', an' that they're at the verry gaybel o' thehouse. Boys, a tell ye there woz a sturr thin, for we wor iviry wan shure o' bin takin preeznars, an' thin there wud a bin a big fine on the hale place. An' there we set, as dumbfoundered a set o' nabbed stillers as ivir a gauger—damn thim!—woz daylighted tae nab. Neddy lukt at me, an' a lukt at Neddy, an' we baith turned roon an' lukt an' glowr't at the hale hoose, an' they lukt an' glowrt at hiz. We heerd the feet o' the sojers rinnin' up tae the hoose, an' they man hae bin at the daur whin Nancy Gillespie rowls the keg in undher her, an' claps hersel doon an it as if it wor a wee creepy stool. An' she hadnae hersel richt doon whin in rins a big sojer, an' we saa anither stannin aside the daur cheek, an' the ane that kim in smelt an' saarched an' smelt an' saarched a' roon, bit cud finn naethin', an' we a'

kept oor sates, an' he wint oot an' didnae ax hiz tae get up ava, an' we wor saved. Bit boys dear whin a left yisthirday moarnin, the poor cutty woz far through, an' woz nearly fainted. Wozn't it a clivir thrick, wanes?"

"Throth thin it woz a good thrick, John," said Owen, "and if it wozn't that I'm not a marryin' man, I'd nearly try an' make Nancy Misses Slevin."

"Ye may spare yirsel the thruble, Owen avick," spoke another of the wake people, "for Jemmy Colhoun and hir is goin' to be married soon."

"Bit a say, Owen," said John Doherty, the narrator of the stilling incident; "tell huz hoo ye fun oot the horse for my uncle Bab; maybe there's some here nivir heard o' it."

"Ay, boys, that woz ane o' the best things ivir I did," began Owen, who, in telling a story, generally used the dialect of his neighbourhood, though at other times he could talk correctly enough; "the black-hearted Puritanic scoundrel that he woz. A'll tell yiz hoo it woz. Bab Doherty had sowl a horse in the fair o' Moneyfin ae Easter fair; an', poor foolish innocent crather that he woz, he let the horse go away tae the man that bocht him ithoot axing onny money except the earlis.* He hardly knew atsel where the man leaved, only jist that he had some notion he leaved below Derry. Well, the man tuk away the horse, an' ae day passed an' nae money came to Bab Doherty, an' anither day passed, an' nae money came, an' a week past, an' a month passed, an' nae money. Weel, wanes, Bab begun to get oneasy, an' aff he wint to make aff his horse, or the money; bit poor Bab come back as he wint, an' could make aff neither horse, man nor money. It was a hard fix, an' se Bab come to me, an' sez he; 'Owen, a wish ye could get me my horse or my money.' Boys, a couldna see may way tae gettin Bab safe enyugh, but a thoct a wud make the trial, an' aff a started ane fine moarnin down tae whar a had heard the man that bocht the horse leaved. Bit av all the days in the week, boys, what ane d'ye think a went on bit on Sunday. For ye see a thoct

* The earnest, the money given at the closing of a bargain.

the horse might be oot grazing, an' a could see him an' 'ad know him. Bit, wanes, tae make a lang story short, a fun oot the horse, an' whin a had him, a soon got the man, bit a fun he woz oot at meetin', the roguin' thief? Boys, dear, it bangs all, so it diz, hoo folk purtind tae be religious jist tae cloak their roguishness! They pit an hypocrisy as easy as their coats, an' tak tae badness as the fish tae water. Bit a suppose its human nathur, human nature."

"Yes, gentlemen, it is human nature;" Mr. Bresland began; "since our great feminine progenitor originally disobeyed Jehovah's command, all sublunary creatures endowed with the reasoning faculty are propense to peccability. Applying appropriate criteria to the mystery we may rationally conclude, according to the severest principle of Aristotelian ratiocination, that our habitudes incline downwards towards the comminuted materials from which our corporeal elements were primarily vivified."

"Boys," said Owen, without moving an unnecessary muscle of his countenance; "can any of you tell me what Mr. Bresland's speeches are like?"

"Like the Hebrew or any outlandish language, for we can't understand them," said one.

"Like the deep ocean, for we never can get to the depth of them," said another.

"Like a high mountain that we can never get to the top of," cried a third.

"Like a stack of turf, because they all end in smoke," added a fourth.

"Like a glass of good poteen, that *you*, Owen boy, would wish to be swallowing," ejaculated a fifth.

"No, boys, he's like a hurricane, that's able to sweep everything before it," commented another. And round the kitchen went the guessing at resemblances, Owen never smiling, and Mr. Bresland quietly stroking his chin. And still the guessing went on.

"Mr. Bresland is like a piano, because he gives out tones when struck," was another's remark.

"I'll tell ye, boys," said an old woman in the corner; "he's like a good fruit tree, always bearing fruits, for children and ignorantly hungry people to feed off."

"Not a bad guess at all, Mrs. McManus," said Owen; "but none of you has struck the right thing yet. Guess away."

"Ax yere question agane, Owen," queried John Doherty.

"What are Mr. Bresland's speeches there, like?" replied Owen.

"They're jist lake the kings an' queens an' impirors an' popes an' dukes that we a' hear sae much claverin' about, bit caan nivr see them," rejoined Doherty.

"Beaten still," replied Owen.

There was a little nephew of Mr. Bresland sitting near Owen during this time, who had apparently been itching for an opportunity to say something for some minutes past, and who now, during a slight lull, astonished the company by crying aloud:—"I think I know a better answer than any of you."

"Well, my little fellow, what's your guess?" asked Owen, patting young Tommy Bresland smilingly on the head; "What is your uncle's speeches like?"

"Just like you, yourself, Owen Slevin," exclaimed the youth.

"And how do you make that out, my young man?" questioned Owen.

"Why jist my uncle's speeches are like you, because there's nothing like them 'in the heaven's above, on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth;' and there's nothing like you in them places either—at least for fighting!"

The solution was so good, so striking, so telling; Owen looked so sheepish; the expounder was so young; the comparison was so rich, that a unanimous burst of laughter pealed from the whole gathering, and continued for many minutes, even Owen and Mr. Bresland themselves chiming in. And for hours after, would a little suppressed smudge be heard, attesting the permanent hold the lad's solution had taken on some of those present.

The fun soon cooled down and Owen proceeded.

"Well, boys, that I may nivr go home if that wasn't my own

answer, that Mr. Bresland's speeches were like what Tommy here has said. But aboot the horse"—and the speaker relapsed into the idiom of the neighbourhood—"as a woz sayin, a soon funn oot the man's hoose, an' that he woz oot at meetin' himsel'; sae aff a started tae the meetin'-house that they pointed oot tae me, an' whin a wint there, not a yard bit a jist walkt in a the daur, an' up a sort o' walk that woz up the middle o' the fihure, an' whin a got aboot half wy up, a stans, an' not a yard, boys, bit a shouted oot in a richt loud voice—"Is Mr. Armstrong in this house?" There waznae ane wi menners enough tae answer in the hale hoose, an' sae I jist shouted agane—"Is Mr. Armstrong in this house?" Weel, thinks a tae mysel, a'll ken if yere here afore a gae eot agane onny way, an oot a shouts ance mare—"Is Mr. Armstrong here, because I want to see him about a horse that he bought in the Easter fair at Moneyfin, an' he hasn't"—Well, boys, a got nae farther, till a felt my coat pullt ahint, an' some ane whispered in my lug 'For the love of God, say no more, but come out and I'll settle with you!' A didnae want tae dee the poor devil onny harm, sae a jist came oot wi him, an' tae mak a lang story short, a got the hale price o' the horse, an' a guid dinner, an' got hame safe an' soun', an' give Bab Doherty his money, an' that's my hale tale."

"And Owen, had you no feeling of compunction at thus disturbing the religious observances of those pious people?" demanded Mr. Bresland.

"Just as much as Mr. Armstrong had when he was defrauding my neighbour of the price of the horse, or as much as I'd have at disturbing the bothersome balderdash of a bothering bosthoon," replied Owen, silyly winking at his interrogator.

"I wonder, gentlemen, who will be the fortunate legatee of our deceased much respected Miss Porter," half queried, half said Mr. Bresland, "she was the last existing representative of a long line of respectable connexions, and now that she has departed, the family of Porter is extinct, so that she had no relative to whom she could transmit her property."

"Maybe she'd lave it to you, Mr. Bresland, who gave her the first learning she got," hinted Owen.

"Preferable to convey it to an individual of literary celebrity than to one of ambidextrous, pugilistic notoriety."

"A wunner, boys, heo the Porters got sae muckle wealth onnyway," asked John Doherty, "its noa fair tae see an oul maid lake her wi sae much money, an deein naethin wi it, an' honest folks lake Masther Bryslan an' mysel wi sae little."

"It need not be an occasion of surprise how the Porters or any other family got their wealth," said Mr. Bresland. "Men are gaining the *pecunia* and landed property daily, if we would only open our eyes and see. Look at Lord Chancellor Liffand, who, not long ago, was perambulating through the Law Courts in our metropolis, and hearing that so many hundreds or thousands of acres of land, in the county Donegal, were put up for sale, and that no purchaser was offered, he became the proprietor of that country side for a shilling an acre.* And again some individuals gain accidental riches, like the Robinsons of Lysnagalligan."

"Pray, how was that, Mr. Bresland?"

The pedagogue paused a little before answering.

"Gentlemen, a brief introduction is indispensable to the right enjoying and understanding of the story of the Robinsons. Few of you but know Lysnagalligan, which means the "Fort of the Galligans," though who the Galligans were is slightly wrapped in mysterious abyssity. However, the Fort was the term applied to any encampment fortified by art, and generally naturally also. The fort in Lysnagalligan was circular, and is almost completely so yet; inside the circle the area was level as possible, and as the surrounding locality was densely clothed with the proud oak tree—fitly denominated the lord of the forest—it is hence supposed that the Fort was the residence of Druids, and that Druidical ceremonies were sometimes celebrated therein. The circumambient elevation was generally hollow and cavernous, suitable either as coverts in moments of danger, resting-places during those periods in which Sol withdrew his luminiumness to other climes, receptacles for secret deposits, or bastiles for the victims await-

* A fact.

ing the sacerdotal sacrifices. There is traditional legend that he who penetrates these *penetralia*, and uses for secular uses the aurated or argentine or other valuable articles discovered therein, that he, instead of enjoying progressional delights, endures retrogressive tortures. Well, old Mr. Henry Robinson, though neither usuriously inclined nor greedily covetous, yet hungered for affluence, bethought him of exploring the mysteries of the fort or Druidical embankment of Lysnagalligan. He succeeded in effecting an entrance, discovered wealth *ad infinitum*, yet he withered away, as the niveous flakes evanish before the incandescent radiations of the solar luminary."

"My God!" ejaculated Owen; "I've got a sore head. Boys, can any of you tell me whether a pet madman, a greedy idiot, a wise clift, a clacking donkey, or a learned blockhead's the worst?"

"A fighting drunkard's worse than any of them," here interposed Mr. Bresland; "gentlemen, did any of you ever study grammar? Does any of you understand the principle of such comparison as this?"

Positive, *anser*; comparative, *asinus*; superlative, *cancer*; superlative of eminence, *vermis*," and the speaker ground his heel along the flagged floor as he concluded.

Owen saw from that motion of Mr. Bresland that he was getting angry, and, though at another time, he would have made no scruple of vexing him to extremes, yet at that particular time, and on such an occasion, he refrained from any more vexatious remarks, using rather appeasing ones, such as:—"Did you ever try your hand at making poetry, Mr. Bresland?"

Now, though Owen asked the question in all sincerity and with truly pacifying intention, the other was not to be satisfied so easily, thinking, probably, that Owen was continuing to taunt him. He therefore answered, somewhat rudely and carelessly:—"Yes, Mr. Slevin, I once made some poetry, and I remember one piece that I think would be very applicable in some companies yet."

"You will surely let us hear it, Master," said Owen."

The other paused for about five minutes, during which there

was silence in the kitchen, and then he repeated the following lines :—

A fool is full of foolish fun,
 Says nothing wise, though always prating;
 Begins a tale which, scarce begun,
 Is sadly wild, disjointed, grating :—
 He talks of this, of that, of yon,
 Of all and all things in a minute;
 And at his rambling rattles on
 As if there was some great thing in it;
 Looks sagely wise, and wisely odd,
 And tries, although intensely stupid,
 To be as wise as e'er a god
 Or goddess, from great Jove to Cupid.
 Of sense, take half a drachm, ay, less;
 Of brains, the hundreth of a monkey's;
 Of wit, the least part you can guess;
 Of stiffness, borrow all a donkey's;
 Of prudence, none; of wisdom, nought;
 Of manners, why, the smallest measure;
 Of badness, all that can be bought;
 Of silliness, just add at pleasure.

Then shuffle up these qualities, and mix them if you can;
 Transplant the smallest portion of this compound to a man;
 And ye've one who thinks he's Solomon, though never in a
 school,

A sample of that hybrid thing, an overgrown wise fool.

"I hope, Mr. Slevin, you won't think I purpose applying this rhapsodical effusion to you," said Mr. Bresland, when he had finished repeating the lines.

"Ne, no, Masther; there's nobody could describe anything so well except the man who felt it. God knows, Masther, I'm sorry for you; I always thoct you wor a wee light in yer tap story, hit noo am sure o' it, after yer discription o' yourself sae well."

There was a laugh after this retort of Owen's, which had scarcely concluded when a new comer entered. He was evidently

only recovering from a state of inebriation, while his disordered dress and half scared appearance warranted the supposition that he had not been getting on too "swimmingly."

"Dameds, boys, gie a fellar a sate near the fire," exclaimed the new comer; "an' a'll tell ye my adventures the night."

This promise soon caused a vacancy to be made for him near the fire, where, when he had got seated, he began and related the story of his seizure that night by Sir Alexander Edwards; and the consequent arrival of Colonel Warburton with the detachment of soldiers, with the discovery, and the treatment the Colonel and his men were given by the Baronet that they might keep the secret.

"Bit, boys, it id be a damned shame tae hide it," concluded the narrator, who was, as it must have been seen, the poor carpenter mistaken by Sir Alexander for an attacking Ribbon pikeman.

"And wha do ye think's gaen tae hide it?" demanded one of the gathering; "not the sojers; a warrant yes; an' my life against a guinea bit we'll scatter it weel tee. The morrow's the fair-day, boys, an' let his sen' it roun' in double quick time."

"And let us add plenty to it," added Owen; "let us make it a great attack by the Ribbonmen, and the seizure of a whole lot of prisoners and guns and ammunition by Sir Alexander and the Colonel; then you know it 'ill be the bigger scald on them when it's talked about to them."

And so the wake people in the kitchen arranged it. But their new stories for the night were not yet over; for, but a half hour or so elapsed after the drunk carpenter's entrance until big Brian Malone entered also. It was then almost day.

"Well, boys, that I may niver drive a nail in a horse's shoe, or hear the ring of my hammer on the anvil, but I got as big a scaar there as I iver got in my life!"

"What was it, Brine? What was it, Brine?" met the burly blacksmith from all corners.

"I had two or three late jobs to get over me, boys, and I thought I would try and get a sleep before coming over here again, so I lay down and got a short wink. Well, I got up and

was coming along jist as day wox appearing; and there, on the barrack wall, I saw three great big things lying on the top of the wall. Boys, I'm not easily frightened, but I tell ye my heart went pit-a-pattin' like a chicken's fist, and off I started for here for help to go down and try to find out what it is. Boys, who'll go with me?"

"Did the appearances partake of the immaterial and supernatural, Bryan, or of the material and natural, can you rationally conclude?" demanded Mr. Bresland; "because, if the former creations of the imagination be the vision, tis useless to pursue the mystery further; but if of the material——"

"Mr. Bresland, had it been ghost, goblin, fetch, fairy, elf, devil or spirit," interrupted Brian; "I'd not have moved an inch; but I know it wox some people—people ef flesh, blood and bones, like ourselves—that wer there; and that's the raison I want to know who they are; and know them I must," concluded the smith, fiercely and defiantly.

There was no scarcity of volunteers who were willing to accompany Brian down to the town, and off five started at what in Ireland is called a "hand trot," that is, half running, half walking.

CHAPTER VIII.

It will not be forgotten in how dangerous a position Colonel Warburton and his two companions were left on the barrack wall; nor in how close proximity to their deaths they felt themselves when the muzzles of the soldiers' muskets were pointed at them. Let it be told how they were preserved from death, and extricated from their predicament.

In those legendary days of the old time when history is more mythical than real, and fable more common than fact, Romulus and Remus, if we are to believe tradition, were saved by a wolf; the cackling of the anserine bipeds saved an army from annihilation; the gentle tapping of the gentle Robin redbreast was a saviour another time; and so on. And another animal it was that prevented the "Fire" being given in Moneyfin barrack yard.

It will be remembered how the negro and his companions cast the horses free when the three men were placed on the wall. The animals had browsed about on the little tufts of verdure growing by the way side; but the sound of the marching and the rattling of the muskets inside were recognised by the Colonel's horse, and responded to by the wise animal with a joyous neigh.

The neighing was known by the soldiers as proceeding from their officer's charger, so they raised the shout, "The Colonel's horse! The Colonel's horse!"

That neigh saved three lives.

The order for the men to lower their arms was immediately given; the large gate was thrown open, and the two horses, whinnying with gladness, cantered into the yard; upward glances were then directed to the wall; ladders were upraised, and the three prisoners were quickly loosened and carried down from their uncertain and unwelcome elevation.

They were at first unable to stand, but in a few moments their blood regained its usual free circulation, their limbs grew free from their cramped feeling, and they were themselves once more, a thing they never, three minutes before, hoped to be.

The piece of paper, pinned to the breast of each, next attracted their attention.

The Colonel read :—" Colonel Warburton, this night may warn you that Miss Carlin has friends, able and willing to protect her. Trouble her no more; if you do, worse will befall you. Remember the widow's curse, and take heed to this warning."

On Master Benjamin's scrap was :—" Master Benjamin Edwards has received a foretaste of what is in store for him, if he continues to persecute Miss Darcus with his attentions that he knows she dislikes."

And the Clinker was taunted with :—" Another breakfast for the Clinker from one who advises him not to back his master in his evil doings, nor do his dirty jobs. From one who warns and defies you, Clinker."

The Colonel's comments ran thus :—" ' Trouble her no more !' Yes, if all the powers of earth, heaven, and hell would go leaguering against me, I'll have my revenge—damn her !"

Master Benjamin spoke none, but silently strode out of the gate and proceeded homewards, where, as will be shown, he had a short though stormy interview with his father, which was the commencement of *his* retaliation.

The Clinker addressed the Colonel, and both proceeded to the apartments of the latter, where they concocted the arrangements for the Clinker to issue a challenge to fight all comers. The Clinker had been a public boxer in his day; and some of his advertisements were still lying in his trunk. He brought them out, filled them up, putting in Fifty Guineas as the penalty, and writing in large letters in the advertisement for "BLACK or white" to appear; as the negro was the individual particularly aimed at—"that black devil," as the Colonel denominated him. They wanted that he should get a complete pounding from the Clinker; the possibility of the latter's being worsted in the fight never for a moment entering into their minds; thinking, in their

pride and badness, that there was no one who could even equal, much less overmatch, such an overgrown giant as Oliver Huxtlely.

Suddenly the Clinker rose with a bound and an oath.

"What is it, Oliver?" demanded the Colonel.

"I've lost my second suit of clothes; and its now only I'm remembering it. I must have lost—yes, I mind the cursed rascal, whoever he was, that grabbed me on my horse's back, took it from me when he seized my arms. I had better ——"

"No, no; never mind, Oliver; we can't help it now. You can't be going back to that damnable glen so soon, but, by ——, we'll soon pay another visit there, and not be so easily spoiled of our prey."

The Colonel was so certain of revenge, ample and immediate, that the loss of a few articles of clothing startled him but little. But when the Clinker told him that there was a portion of a letter in those clothes which might make thousands of pounds to both of them, he was not only startled, but vexed and maddened. The Clinker proceeded to explain, and his explanation amounted to something like the following:—

That a comrade soldier of his had one time told him a story that had happened in Ireland some thirty years ago. This comrade, whose name was Ramsay, was married, and having no children, Mrs. Ramsay used to act as wet-nurse in any family she could. She had nursed many children in England, but they never made out too well, rather moving down in the world than up. They were not unlike many another couple, not hesitating to perform a dishonest trick, if it brought them some remuneration and they could get away with it. Mrs. Ramsay had been long watching for a chance to change children some way, so that when both of them would become full-grown, she could make plenty of money by working on their fears and hopes; the fears of one of them lest he or she should be ousted from his false position—for Mrs. Ramsay was determined that one of the children should belong to a rich family, and the other to a poor one—and the hopes of the other that he should regain his lost inheritance. So thus would she work on the hopes and fears of her

unfortunate victims as long as she could wring a sou from either. The great difficulty, however, was to get the children at all; and the next point, to get them changed.

An opportunity at length offered. She effected the change, and replaced a Baronet's son by a farmer's; putting the young scion of nobility to learn farming. Mrs. Ramsay was satisfied now, and her only uneasiness was to get out of the country. This, however, she could not do, until her husband, who was away in Belfast with a detachment of the men, returned. He came at length, and the evening came when his wife had all her arrangements completed to leave Moneyfin by daybreak the next morning. It happened though, that, that very evening, the farmer's wife, whose child Mrs. Ramsay was nursing, and who had herself been sick, came for her little son; and though the nurse pleaded hard to get keeping the little thing for a few days longer, she was so fond of it and it was thriving so beautifully, she said, the mother would not leave without it. So Mrs. Ramsay had to give it up, very unwillingly she appeared to do it too; but her hopes were bright enough for all her seeming sorrow. For the fact was, *she had actually exchanged the babies*, and none knew the secret save soldier Ramsay and his wife; and was the secret not worth as much to them that way as any other, and besides they were saved the trouble and expense of rearing the child, no slight item in their hard calculation of future profits.

But there was a third knew the secret, yet dare not tell of it, as she was the nurse charged with the nursing of the Baronet's son, and had committed herself by consenting to the change for the object of getting a nice, healthy, rosy baby, instead of her own one, which had become sickly, pale and dying. Ramsay had told the Clinker the story years ago in a drunken confidential chat, but had never let out the names of the parties concerned till two days before, when he sent him—the Clinker—a letter, giving the names of the Baronet, and the Baronet's false son and real son. When the Clinker was coming to Ireland, Ramsay was in need of some money, and got the loan of fifteen pounds from him, giving him in lieu a promise of half the money they would get for their secret, but never giving the names till this

letter came. This was the letter that was lost in their ride to the glen, or, as the Clinker thought, at the tussle in the glen. He had intended, he told the Colonel in conclusion, to go to the Baronet that very day, and demand some money as the price of his silence, but he now thought it more advisable to postpone his visit till after the fight.

Such is the substance of the communication made to Colonel Warburton by Oliver: its truths and its falsities will be known as the story progresses towards its conclusion.

"But you have not yet told me the names of Baronet or the farmer or the young men, Oliver?" asked the Colonel.

The Clinker then told him how, dead drunk even as Ramsay was, when telling him the story, he exacted a most solemn, terrifying oath from him, that he would never mention to anyone, anyone whatsoever, no matter how intimate nor under how great danger nor the most positive pledges of secrecy, the names of those interested until after his—Ramsay's—death, except to the parties themselves. And the worst of it was, the Colonel thought, that those very names were in the paper the Clinker had lost; "But, very fortunately," he concluded by saying; "I had blotted out the most important parts of comrade Ramsay's letter; so that, Colonel, even some smart person would find it, neither sense nor connectedness could be found in it."

With this Job consolation the Colonel, astonished as he was, was compelled to be content; outwardly so only; for in his heart he set himself to penetrate and understand the mysterious affair as soon as ever he could. He had no clue even to the residence of any of the parties, nor might he attempt to worm aught from his servant.

"Well, we will appear at any rate, Oliver," said he; "and as no one will attempt to appear—hadn't they better not, eh?—we'll have the satisfaction of making his worship the mayor fork over fifty guineas—a nice day's work, Oliver, eh?"

"Not for fifty guineas, nor for ten fifties almost, Colonel, and I'm only a poor soldier in His Majesty's service, would I miss having one hearty smash at the damned nigger's nose; whatever the h—l brought him to Ireland to run across me, it would be

better he had never left his own land;" and the speaker's countenance swelled with the demoniac expression similar to the one he wore when lying bound and gagged on widow Mason's floor.

At this moment there was a rap at the door, and a servant entered with the Colonel's letters. Looking over them—there were five—he tossed them aside till he came to one, the superscription of which was strange and unknown to him; he could not recognise the handwriting. He wondered whence it came; and as he wondered, he tore it open and read—

"Colonel Warburton, Esq.,
Moneyfin.

DEAR SIR,

We are extremely sorry to be the medium of conveying to you the news—sad and sudden—of your respected uncle's demise, and that of his entire family. His residence was burned to the ground; Sir Ronald and all his five children, together with Lady Warburton, were burned to cinders. Strange to say, the servants all escaped uninjured. Sir Ronald's will was made long since. It leaves all his property to his brother, except £5,000 for you, which we are authorised and ready to hand over to you any moment you wish. The new Baronet is not at present in England, but we have notified him of the lamentable occurrence, as well as of the change in his position. We shall be happy to obey your commands regarding your £5,000 as soon as you send us directions.

We are, Sir, your obedient servants,

MORROW & STEELE, Solrs.

Offingham,

17th October, 18——."

"Well, Oliver, how sounds that news in thine ears, my good child? My old uncle, Sir Ronald, is dead, burned to ashes, with his house and family; left his title and property to my uncle Edward, now Sir Edward, and has left to his nephew, your most obedient myself, the sum of £5,000—eh, Oliver man?"

For a moment, as he spoke of the sudden death of his uncle and cousins, there swept across his countenance like the light-

ning's blasting gleam, a wave of exquisite anguish. Again it came, in ineffable painfulness; and when he raised his head, after leaning it on his hands for nearly two minutes, his face was pale as a "spectre ghost."

Reader, at that moment, the poor widow's curse on the hill side long ago, on her daughter's murderer, came vividly before his mind; and he shuddered as he bitterly thought that it was perhaps that same curse on the young gauger, that had been the cause of such a horrible death to his relatives? And would retribution not fall on himself soon? Nay, might not that morning's avenging have sprung from the same anathema? "God of Heaven!" he ejaculated in his terror; "can it be possible that my misdeed is to bring a curse on our entire family? Can it be possible that any know of the thing around here? Yes, by Heaven, I had forgotten; the paper hinted at the murder, and threatened—ha, he threatened, too, did he? Well, I'll not give up anyhow."

And with this unwise resolve, the Colonel and his servant sat down to the breakfast that had just been brought in, eating heartily of the substantial food set before them, and talking and planning all the time about the fight.

The meal ended, Colonel Warburton rode out, warning Oliver to prepare himself, and get a good second, and saying that he would be back in good time, for he was going over a few hours to the wake at Castleporter; "You know, Oliver," he said to his worthy servant; "I often told you that old Miss Porter was a sweetheart of mine once, and who knows but she has left me something in her will, if her former affection be still alive. Yes, Oliver, I was young and handsome then, and Sophia thought I was going to marry her."

Thinking over many things, the Olinker's story, Miss Porter's death, and the consequent distribution of the Porter property, his uncle's sudden fate and terrible death, his own future chance of succeeding to the title and estates, and so on, Castleporter was reached in due time. He rode up to the kitchen door, dismounted, and was greeted by a hearty burst of laughter as he entered the kitchen. He would not have entered by that

apartment but that he wanted some one to take his horse, and believed such a one could be "come-at-able" more readily in the vulgar portion than in the more aristocratic apartments.

A slight hush followed the Colonel's entrance, which lasted for some minutes, but then the mirth and laughter broke out with renewed energy, all gazing so comically at the new comer as he stood so sheepishly foolish-looking. Still the laughter continued, yet he felt that anger or imperiousness were better curbed in such society and in such a place; so, putting on as pleasant a face as he could, he jokingly asked:—"Come, boys, some of you tell me the joke, and don't keep all the fun from me. What is it?"

The laughing, good-humoured countenance of Brian Malone was the most prominent one in the Colonel's view, and to him had the question been most particularly put. Nor was the blacksmith backward in giving a reply.

"Why, Colonel, we were laughing at what some one here is telling us about the adventures of two or three people last night, or early this morning."

"And what was it that should make it so very laughable?"

"Well, you see, Colonel, we were hearing the joke just as you appeared, and we all began to wonder how you felt this morning after the purty figgers you an' Master Benjamin Edwards an' your big servant cut on the tap o' the barrack wall this mornin'. Wor you afear, Colonel darling, when you felt the muskets o' your sojers pointed at your bodies on the wall? Boys, worn't they high-minded, an' early risers this mornin'?"

Before Brian had concluded, the Colonel felt he was long enough there; ay, too long; better, in fact, he had not come at all. With a muttered oath, and an accompanying bound, he leaped on his horse's back, stuck the spurs into the animal's sides, and galloped away. Approaching Moneyán, he met Ned McCool; and as they passed each other, Ned coolly whistling "Up in the mornin' early," the Colonel turned round in his saddle and gazed after the young peasant, muttering as he did so:—"That's the only man in the country could fight Oliver. I'd like to see them at it, for they ought to be good matches.

I'd fear for Oliver's laurels, and my fifty guineas if they met; and what if McCool accepts Oliver's challenge?"

So when he reached home he told Oliver that the only man in the country whom they might fear was Ned McCool; but what was his astonishment when he heard that Ned and the Clinker had once had a meeting; and that Ned was beaten! But he did not hear—no, no, the Clinker suppressed that portion—that Ned was just only able to walk out at the time after rising from a fever, nor that the Clinker gave the only blow that was given when the other was carelessly and unguardedly throwing off his coat. Nor did he know either—how could he?—that Ned was resolved not to suffer the Clinker to leave the country until they would measure strength together.

CHAPTER IX.

The breakfast bell at Rosedale had been rung only a few minutes, and Sir Alexander Edwards was solitarily enjoying his matutinal meal on the morning so memorable to his son, when that hopeful scion burst in on the parent and rudely addressed him—

"Did you not tell me, father, that I might marry Miss Darcus any moment I wished, if you grew once determined to put on the spur?"

"And I told you nothing but the truth, Benjamin, but——"

"Never mind the 'buts', I wish to marry her at once," interrupted the insolent son; "and I want you to hurry away to Sir James at once, and arrange for an immediate marriage. Lose no time; and let the thing come off as soon as you are able to drive it—*to-morrow*, if possible. I'll meet you here at your return to hear that you have everything settled for an immediate union. I must have no delay; so *to-morrow*, remember, for *to-morrow*," and the fierce young man bolted from his father's presence, and into his own private room, where he slammed to the door and locked it, drew out a brandy bottle from a little press, filled out two glass-fulls of the ardent spirit, drank them off, stamped about the floor, and thus cogitated with himself.

"'Persecute Miss Darcus,' indeed! Fine persecution it would be. Oh, no, I'll not persecute her; no, no; I'll only marry her. And then I'll break her heart—*ha*, that will be my revenge!—and when she is lying on her death-bed with a broken-heart, I'll bring Santley—*furies* seize him, for he's at the bottom of last night's business, I know he is—*ay*, I'll bring him to her bed-side, and I'll gloat over their broken hearts. Poor idiot, fool, madman, devil, that he is, to think I couldn't penetrate his disguised hand in the thing! By the G—— of Heaven, he little knows Benjamin Edwards, if he thinks I'll not give him *retalia-*

tion for his merits. I learned some Scripture:—‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,’ will be my gospel. ‘Persecute Miss Darcus,’ forsooth! How he fears lest the dainty lady may have a cold wind to blow on her! Oh, it will be a glorious revenge! She dying, in the last agonies of death; he living a dying death mourning over her, and I exulting over them both. Oh, I’ll be careful of her for his sake, won’t I? Won’t you, Ben? Won’t you be careful of your wife for Hubert Santley’s sake? Perdition seize him! To be discovered in such a position and by half a regiment, too! How does Warburton bear it, I wonder? I’ll go and see him—but no, I’ll not go out so soon after it. Perdition devour them, one and all, and the old cripple too—heavens! could I only meet him again—and the negro, and the devils in masks, and her, too;” and he consigned them all in a lump to a certain unmentionable, warm region, in the “lower countrie.”

As if his concluding anathemas had somewhat cooled his anger and emptied his stomach, Master Benjamin ordered in breakfast, which he consumed amidst growling mutterings, well seasoned with oaths and blasphemies against one and all of his enemies, and even included his own father and mother for having dared to bring him into the world where he could receive such an insult—to be disgraced—exposed—endangered—dishonoured—shamed—it was too bad, insufferable, vexatious, cruel!

Meantime Sir Alexander and Sir James Darcus got seated in the large library of Heather Hall in an interesting conversation; at least, so it would seem from the excited, half joyous, half anxious countenances of the two gentlemen. Sir Alexander was speaking.

“As I was saying, my dear Sir James, I am growing old now, and wish to see Ben settled in life before I am taken from him. You and I are agreed on this matter long since, and I see no reason for delaying the marriage any longer.”

“I adhere to what I said on this subject last evening, Edwards,” Sir James replied; “I shall further and advocate your views every way I can, provided we once gain Annie’s consent.

Use compulsion I shall not, and we already know her dislike to the proposed union."

"When you came to me in your need," was the cold response; "I did not wait to consult with my son were he agreeable or not, before I obliged you. And must he and I now be kept waiting till the delicate fancy of your daughter be satisfied? To give her time, perhaps, to connect herself clandestinely with some of your tenants' sons—with that young Santley, it may be. How happy would you feel in hearing him pointed out as son-in-law to Sir James Darcus!"

The intended sarcasm hit its mark. Sir James was weak enough to coincide with his brother Baronet's views, for he winced under the dilemma, and replied:—"It was unnecessary to remind me of the debt I owe you; though it may be proper for me to say that marriage is a far, far different transaction to a mere pecuniary obligation. You seem to forget that, Sir Alexander; but I do not. If I did, I should have no hesitation in compelling my daughter to be agreeable to our views. As it is, however, and with your son as suitor, I shall brook no interference from any of my tenants—and that young Santley does seem to be on intimate terms with Annie; I wish his father had no lease, I'd soon clear my estate of him. But name your day, Edwards."

"Let us see. I am going to London on Monday next; this is Wednesday; what say you to let the ceremony be performed on Friday, and the young couple can come with me to London on Monday to spend their honeymoon?"

"And when there you are pledged to obtain the fulfilment of your promise to me?"

"I am pledged to return from London as Baron Rosedale, bringing with me the letters patent for your elevation to the peerage as Baron Darcus, both titles to descend to our heirs, by birth or by will."

"Should you fail, Sir Alexander,——"

"Should I fail, my dear Darcus, you hold my written promise that you may burn the bond of eighty-five thousand pounds which you owe me for money I lent you; and of which you shall have

the only papers in existence ere I leave for London. Should I succeed, and should your daughter become Baroness Rosedale, either immediately or prospectively—are not those the words of our agreement?—I am not to claim the payment of the bond; provided that you in your last will bequeath all your property to your daughter, Baroness Rosedale—Baroness now, or in the future.”

“Perfectly correct, Edwards, as far as you go, but there is one slight, only a trifling omission. One of the particulars of our agreement is, that I am held responsible for my daughter’s hand, only on condition that your son asks her from herself and me—is it not so?”

“Quite true,” answered the other, biting his lips; he had not expected Sir James would remember this article, and felt disappointed; “and you may rest assured, indeed, that that part of our contract will not go unfulfilled. I’ll send Ben over to-night to make his formal demand, and you and he can then, with Miss Darcus’s assistance and sanction, complete the requisite arrangements for the marriage. Come, Darcus, why do you seem so despondent at losing your daughter, when you will be welcoming her home one of these days as Baroness Rosedale of Rosedale?”

Some few unimportant sentences concluded the important interview, and Sir Alexander took his leave. Cantering gleefully down the avenue, he met Hubert Santley riding up, and in his exuberance of joy at the victory he had just gained, he reined up his horse, and addressed Hubert, an act of humility and forgiveness which surprised himself afterwards as much as it did Hubert at the moment:

“Good morning, Mr. Santley; I trust you are nothing the worse of the wetting you got yesterday evening? On my honour, I forgot to enquire after Miss Darcus, though her father and I were arranging the particulars of her marriage with my son, which is to take place on Friday.”

“Oh, thank you, Sir Alexander, I am nothing the worse. You took the advantage of me, for I was just going to enquire about the accident that happened to you last night. I trust it was nothing serious?”

"There was no accident happened to me, last night, Mr. Santley."

"I am really very glad for the sake of the neighbourhood, and your own, to hear you say so, Sir Alexander. Really there is no knowing what to believe. I have been told so often this morning of the attack that was made on your house last night, and that it was so dangerous a detachment of the military was sent for, and that Colonel Warburton commanded in person, and that a great many prisoners were taken, and bundles of muskets and pikes——"

"All lies, Mr. Santley, all lies—Good morning, sir."

"Good morning, Sir Alexander; I'm rejoiced to hear it. Good morning."

And as the baronet rode hastily away, Hubert sat looking after him, heartily enjoying his discomfiture and evident chagrin, till a bend of the avenue shut out the view. Hubert then became grave and moody.

"So An—— Miss Darcus, is going to be married; and to Benjamin Edwards! Has she consented to be the bride—the bride—the—bride—the—bride—of such a man? If she has—but I needn't think so—there's a still, small palpitation that is whispering she's against such a thing. Going to be married to Benjamin Edwards! And you, Hubert Santley, have been a big jackass of a fool not to know your fate before now. Ha, and what might my fate be! Yes or no? I'll know which before I sleep. On, Revenge, my brave horse, and once more carry your rider to victory."

"Or to a pause," added a well-known voice, for Hubert had uttered his concluding sentence aloud, and hence it was that the new-comer could reply, and give the option which he gave.

"Why, Ned, how are you here?" asked Hubert, without even turning in the saddle.

"What a question, Hubert? Don't you know I came here on my Irish tandem—one foot before the other!" laughed Ned McCool, while his hearty, ingenuous countenance twinkled mirthfully at the joke. "But, come, Hubert, draw in Revenge under the trees; I have something to tell you about," and he more

staidly led the way into a clump of trees convenient, his foster-brother following.

"Look at this specimen of a placard that I found posted up on the walls and gates of the town this morning as I came through, looking for you, you roving rider you," and Hubert was handed a sheet of paper which he immediately unfolded and, to his infinite astonishment, read as follows:—

"A FIGHT, OR FIFTY GUINEAS.

"The inhabitants of Moneyfin and the neighbourhood are informed that the celebrated English boxer, Oliver Huxtle, hereby challenges all comers, **BLACK** or white, for the above sum of **FIFTY GUINEAS**. He will appear on this, the fairday, in the evening, at three o'clock precisely, in the market square. Hurrah for the great English boxer."

"Why, Ned," ejaculated Hubert, "what has come over the Clinker to issue this challenge? Has the negro been tickling him up someway that he has inserted the word 'black' in such prominent characters? 'Tis most extraordinary!"

"You may well say so, Hubert," replied Ned; "extraordinary, indeed! I'm going to accept the challenge, and I want you to come and back me. Now you needn't go and try to persuade me against it. I'm determined to try a fisticuffing,"—and the speaker smiled—"with the Clinker in the market square this evening. No man from across the Channel shall ever get the chance to make his brags that he couldn't meet his match in an Irishman, while I have strength to wield an arm or strike a blow for old Ireland;" nor would the man who saw the force and pith with which Ned's hand and arm clove through the air as he spoke, have coveted too anxiously the position of an opponent.

"I'll not try to persuade you from fighting the Clinker, Ned," said Hubert; "I know your strength and pluck, and only warn you to be wary and steady, for the Clinker has immense strength. I hope for our country's sake you'll win. You know I'll be on the ground at the right time to back you; and there'll be friends enough present to see fair play in spite of all the soldiers in the

town. I suppose Colonel Warburton will be the Clinker's baker?"

"Very likely; I didn't hear who would back him. I'll get Brian Malone to be my second; and my life on it, Hubert, but we'll match any two of them, especially when you'll be there to back us, as I knew you would;" and the foster-brothers shook hands in a sterling, true grasp:—"And now, Hubert," continued Ned; "read this other paper that the negro handed me an hour or two ago."

Hubert took the soiled scrap of paper, which was evidently the side of a letter, and with difficulty deciphered the following on it:

"Brave him to his — tell him that Master B — is no — of his that H — is the real — & threaten him with exposure unless he gives you three — pounds write soon and good to 27 H — st. — n

Mr. — r —

Zedekiah R — y.

The Ba — ks Moneyfin, Ireland."

"We could easily fill it in in this way, Hubert," said Ned, taking the paper from the other's hands. "'Brave him to his teeth. Tell him that Master Benjamin is no son of his; that Hubert Santley is the real heir; threaten him with exposure unless he gives you three thousand pounds. Write soon to 27, Holborn, or High Street, or Hanover Street, or Henry Street, London, or Dublin, or Aberdeen, or many another fifty places ending in n; the whole directed to 'Mr. Oliver Huxley,' at 'The Barracks,' Moneyfin. I must say that the 'Zedekiah R — y' beats me, though that may be found out too. And the man that is to be braved is Sir Alexander Edwards.'"

"With whom I am just after having a friendly passage-at-arms as he rode down the avenue there a few minutes since. But how rapidly your imagination has run away with your good sense, Ned," laughingly said Hubert; "let us try another reading. 'Brave him. To his teeth tell him that Master Benjamin is no friend of his; that Hunter is the real owner. Threaten him with exposure unless he gives you three hundred pounds.' For the rest, Ned, your reading would suit well enough, if we substitute Colonel Warburton for Sir Alexander Edwards."

"And yet, Hubert, I would bet my hopes of winning the fight to-day, and risk my chance of losing it, that something in that paper concerns you. The Colonel has no horses from Hunter now that reference would be made to them. I would advise you to take some steps in the affair, Hubert," continued Ned earnestly, laying his hand on his foster-brother's knee; "or you may hereafter rue it. Or stay, will you give me leave to try my skill in sifting out the mystery? I'll set the negro to it, and you know Indian skill is proverbial in following up a track and coming to a true solution. May I go at it?"

"With all my heart, Ned. Take what steps you like. As for me I am too happy in the position I was reared in to wish for a change."

"But surely not careless or foolish enough to permit wrong to pass for right. To suffer another to win the hand whose owner's heart is in your keeping is not what an Irishman usually does, nor what I would like to see my foster-brother doing."

"I am not sure of her heart, Ned. However, do your best, and I'll go on to the Hall, and know before I see you again whether I'm the favoured one or not, or whether Master Benjamin is. 'Tis now almost eleven o'clock; I'll be down in the town in good time, so till then, take care of yourself."

And the foster-brothers separated, Hubert proceeding on to the Hall. Having arrived at the mansion, he threw his horse's reins, more correctly bridle, to a servant, and was preceded towards the library by the old porter, with whom Hubert was a great favourite, and who seized the opportunity to whisper:—"Sir Alexander Edwards was here to-day, Master Hubert, and won a promise from the master that his son and Miss Annie are to be married on Friday." The sentence was accompanied by a look which said as clearly as words could, "Will you—you, let this crime, this great deathly wrong be perpetrated?" Hubert returned the look satisfactorily, but there was no time for further speech, they having reached the library, into which the old servant announced the visitor, who found Sir James stern and haughty, and Miss Darens seated and weeping.

"Good morning, Mr. Santley; you have arrived at a most opportune moment to witness my daughter's refusal to acquiesce in my intended arrangements for her benefit. She has taken upon her the disagreeable choice of defying me or pleasing herself in the important matter. What think you of that proceeding, sir, in an only and motherless child?"

At another time Hubert would have excused himself from replying to such a question under such circumstances, but he felt that there was so much depending on the present interview, and he felt, besides, though he was not looking towards Miss Darcus, that she had her gaze intently fixed on him through her tears, anxiously awaiting his reply. Perhaps some small palpitation whispered that his reply might have no small effect in the reply he intended to ask from the lady during his visit; so, waiving all minor considerations he answered Sir James's somewhat rude and hasty address.

"I have such faith in Miss Darcus's good sense and judgment, Sir James, that I am sure she will decide on the right course to follow."

"In other words, that she may be quite right, Mr. Santley, in opposing my commands, even though I give them with all paternal influence, while eschewing compulsion," replied her father.

"But even paternal authority, permit me to say, Sir James, may be stretched to improper limits, when one is blinded by interested projects or impelled by interested hands. Pardon me, Sir James; but I met Sir Alexander Edwards leaving here when I was coming up, and he informed me, quite unexpectedly I assure you, that he had just been up making arrangements with you about the marriage of his son, Master Benjamin, with your daughter—may I beg to enquire if that is the point on which your daughter so firmly opposes you?"

"Yes, sir, you may enquire, surely, but do you fancy I am going to inform you? And yet, why should I not? So, sir, that is the point which my daughter opposes. Sir Alexander and I have arranged that the marriage is to take place on Friday,

and the expectant bridegroom is to be here to-night to demand in form Annie's hand. Now, sir?"

The "Now, sir" was equivalent to the speaker's saying "What will she do, even with your assistance, to hope to succeed in altering my irrevocable decree? What can ye two, puny beings that ye are, do in opposition to my superior, my parental, authority and determination?"

"May I dare to remind you, Sir James, that there are persons who look upon marriage as they would upon a mere worldly transaction, and who forget that lives, happiness, prosperity, and comfort—temporal and eternal—depend upon the union which such people, blinded by an unwise concern, are unwisely hurrying on. I trust, Sir James, you are not one of such; I know you are not; for, wealthy and respected as you are, you have none of those drossy motives to incite you to a particular proposition, further than the happiness—and that is everything a father should wish—of your daughter is concerned."

The Baronet was a little startled at the nearness of Hubert's remarks to the truth; and this surprise it was that prevented him from replying immediately to what he considered the unnecessary, if not impertinent expressions of the other. He had just recovered himself from the internal confusion, and was about to make a warm retort, when the porter again entered, and announced that another visitor most urgently desired to see Sir James on extremely important business.

"Who is it, Scavlan?"

"I don't know him at all, Sir James."

"What is he like, then, idiot?"

"He is a great tall negro, Sir James, and is very pressing to see you. He told me to be sure and tell you that you'd rue it all the days of your life if you'd refuse to see him."

"A negro! What can such an animal require of me! I suppose I must see him," and the Baronet walked stiffly and proudly out, not vouchsafing even a look at the two he was leaving in the library.

Strange forgetfulness, Sir James! Where all your wariness, your vaunted determination that your daughter should become

Sir Alexander Edwards's daughter-in-law, that you should leave her in Hubert Santley's presence—in his of all others—in his against whom you have been repeatedly warned—in the company of him who is worth an infinity of such men as Master Benjamin? But 'twas fate, Sir James, probably; a fate against which, had you known it, you were as impotent to contend as the tossed sea-gull against the united fury of Boreas and Neptune.

And you, Hubert, how happy the opportunity! Improve it, man.

But poor Hubert remained silent.

He had many a time faced real dangers, unmoved, yet he now felt himself quivering all over when simply addressing a young lady.

Nor was Miss Darous on her side less nervous; she was even more agitated than her companion. She could not speak the thoughts that her heart was full of until Hubert would speak first, and, though they both felt the importance—life-long they knew it would be—of the moment, yet both of them felt an impossibility to seize the opportunity. Time was gliding swiftly away. Sir James would soon return, and when would a suitable occasion again present itself? With an effort, equal to the occasion, and generated by the necessity, Hubert aroused himself, and, in his deeply bass, but mellow, voice, addressed his silent companion.

CHAPTER X.

When Sir James Darcus entered the apartment where the negro was waiting to see him, he was immediately addressed by his visiter.

"I understand, Sir James Darcus, that you are going to get your handsome daughter, God bless her, married to that long-legged biped, known as Master Benjamin Edwards?" The nigger idiom is put into English throughout the conversation, as the writer believes it will be more acceptable to the reader.

The speaker afterwards told how he thus suddenly plunged in *medias res*, to prevent Sir James from questioning him, as he knew, he said, that the Baronet's choleric temper would be excited to passion, and consequently to forgetfulness of the propriety of knowing the name of his strange visiter. And the Baronet was raised.

"How is this?" he half ejaculated, half shouted; "am I in my own house, or have I my senses about me! How dare you attempt in my presence to slander my intended son-in-law? What are you, or what is it to you, that you interfere with my intentions, you alien, you; not even a countryman?"

"I intend no slander, Sir James Darcus, but to open blinded eyes to the truth. Your intended son-in-law is no son of Sir Alexander Edwards. I cannot yet prove what I say, but I am so firmly convinced of its truth that I confidently appeal to your well-known straightforwardness, and demand it from you, in your daughter's name, that you shall lose no time in sifting this matter to its bottom. Ask Sir Alexander about it, and judge from his manner if he has any knowledge of it. As you love your daughter, and hope her to be happy, do this before it is too late, and you may hereafter bless the poor African stranger who prompted you to act so."

The Baronet strode several times across and around the apartment, while the negro was speaking, and continued to tramp about for almost three minutes after the other ceased; the probability is, too, that he would have rung for the servants that they might put out the daring, insolent intruder, but that the latter had, quite accidentally of course, placed himself directly in front of the bell-pull, and though Sir James would have no hesitation in pulling the cord, yet he felt disinclined to push his visitor out of the way, a thing necessary to be done, ere reaching the cord.

"Have you any proof of this trumped-up, most improbable story you have told me?" at length demanded Sir James.

"None just now, but before morning I hope to have sufficient to satisfy you that my story is true," replied darkey.

"And on mere unfounded suspicion—not even a shadow of proof—you wish me to postpone my daughter's marriage, to break my pledged word to a friend, to become a beg— a believer in every calumnation that a disordered fancy or an interested envy may create! Begone out of my house, lest I be tempted to get you kicked out."

"Well, you will see Sir Alexander Edwards, Sir James?"

"I will see him."

"And suddenly upbraid him of foisting a stranger, a beggar, an upstart on you instead of his real son and heir?"

"I will upbraid him; but go, that I may not be tempted to do you harm."

"I will go; but remember, Sir James, that an eternal curse may hover around you unless you take the proper steps to discover the truth, and so do a great right by preventing a great wrong. And I'll meet you here on your return from Rosedale, to show you that I am not afraid to put myself in your power, a thing I wouldn't do, Sir James, if I had been telling you lies, or a trumped-up story, as you say."

"Go—Go—Go—Go—Will you?" shouted Sir James, throwing himself into a large arm-chair, as the other departed, seemingly satisfied of the effect he had produced. And the Baronet sat in his cushioned seat, ruminating over the negro's story; and, in

spite of himself, feeling that there might be some foundation for the thing, the more especially as Lady Edwards was so handsome, so symmetrically beautiful, and so was Sir Alexander, though in a less degree: then why was Master Benjamin so misshapen? This gave some colour to the hypothesis that darkey's tale might turn out true.

Meantime, how succeeded Hubert Santley in his interview with Miss Darcus? It has already been told how he so nervously and liquidly addressed his companion. He said one word only.

"Annie."

Only a dissyllable, yet how difficult to utter, and how comprehensive. Not the mere word alone; but the tone, the look, the gesture; the "language of the eyes" that the dullest can understand; the language of the countenance, reflected from the full heart, that the most ignorant can translate,—all lent force to the word, and intesity to the meaning. And how sweet to her to whom that name was addressed! As the chime of gushing water to the parched traveller on the "boundless prairie" or the sun-burnt, sandy Sahara; as the spotlessly white flag carrying the "Reprieve" to the innocent victim on the scaffold panting for life; as unexpected success to a forlorn hope mounting the impregnable redoubts of a besieged fortress;—as any, or all of these put together, came the single word—only a little word—to Annie Darcus.

It brought hope to her, for it spoke of assistance; strength to her, for it told of a sympathetic impulse beating in another's breast; happiness, for it spoke of love in a language and tone none could misunderstand; and it brought, more than all, relief, for it was pregnant with ineffable joyousness of support, and indomitable determinations of oppositions to petty tyrannies or unwise compulsions or restrictions. So full of joy and thankfulness was she that she could not speak; yet her beaming look of fondest trust and truest faith was brimming with heartfelt earnestness to such an overpowering, telling effectiveness, that Hubert was satisfied to speak once more.

"Annie, *could* you love me?"

What an emphasis he laid on the "*could*"? As if he doubted

of so great bliss to himself. As if he feared that an immeasurable gulf lay between him and his hopes. As if he said that he wished to end this uncertainty—this heart-burning anxiety—of success or failure. As if all his doubtings, all his hopes, all his aspirations, all his troubles, or all his happinesses depended on the answer. And did they not?

And the answer came to him, making him comfortable, decided, happy, and resolved.

Comfortable, because he was comforted by it. Decided, for he wavered no more regarding his future. Happy, for the object of his heart's best and dearest wishes returned his affections. And resolved, for he would oppose existing arrangements to his very utmost.

"Oh, Hubert mine!"

Such was her answer, and thus might he translate it.

"Oh, Hubert, why have you been so long silent, and I panting for your avowal? Why have you let me be so long tried, and I so hoping for your confession? Do you not know, can you conceive, how joyously my heart beats to hear you speak? Be yours? Yes, with every pulse of my heart, every breath of my breast, I'll be yours in reality, for I'm yours in heart, yours and yours alone. Oh, Hubert."

And so did he translate it; and he was right in so doing.

Dear readers of these pages, ye who have passed as successfully as Hubert Santley has done through such encounters as his with Miss Darcus, cast back your memories to those moments of bliss in your own lives; and ye have the picture of happiness which that library of Sir James Darcus presented when his daughter so sweetly and so satisfactorily responded to her companion. And as for you, who have the trying moment before you, let Hope use her fairest colours in painting the scene; and be assured that, though Memory is far more true, Hope is a thousand times more uncertainly brilliant. Let Memory and Hope, then, weave the web for your imagining regarding Hubert's happy success with his companion; and may thy similar blissful moment, dear reader who hast the ordeal to meet, be less rudely broken in upon, than was the interview just recorded, when Sir

James burst in unannounced, after his cogitations, anything but agreeable as they were, succeeding his conversation with the negro.

"I am going to Rosedale, Annie, to see Sir Alexander on some business of moment, but hope to return by dinner-time. Come, Mr. Santley, may I have your company towards town?"

Hubert durst not refuse the unwelcome, disagreeable invitation,—who could do so under the circumstances?—for long and satisfactory as was his interview with Miss Darcus, he was far from being pleased at his being so soon and rudely pressed to leave. But when are persons, in such a position as his, satisfied with even more than a moderate period of time to themselves! So, with only a look of farewell, the lovers parted, Sir James and Hubert riding away from the Hall.

A little outside the avenue gate, they met Master Benjamin riding towards the mansion.

"I am going to Rosedale, Edwards, to see Sir Alexander—will you return with me?"

"Can I not see Miss Darcus, Sir James?"

"Better not now—come along," jerked out the intended father-in-law; and the three rode on towards Rosedale.

At the crossroads, Hubert separated himself from the other two gentlemen who rode straight forward, he turning off towards the right by the road leading to the town, which stood scarcely a quarter of a mile distant. He arrived in Moneyfin, just at the height of the fair.

Who has not heard of an Irish fair? Its fights, and its ballad-singers, and its booths, and its itinerant showmen, and the stands of the pedlars, and the boards of the hawkers, and its courtings, and its drinkings? Nor was this particular fair wanting in all the more customary amusements. But there was little in it differing from the usual class of such gatherings, except the unceasing buzz about the approaching fight. Men wondered at it, and talked over it till they were dry, and then "another drap" had to be got to quench their thirst. Crowds or knots of anxious, excited looking people were here-and-there all over the town to

be found discussing the challenge, and the probability of an opponent's appearing against the Clinker.

"Fifty Guineas! Fifty Guineas!"

This was the general cry among the townspeople; a cry of consternation it was, for they well knew they would have to pay that sum should no man be found to meet the challenger. Thus were matters moving when Hubert sauntered up through the fair after stabling Revenge. It was now between one and two o'clock.

"Did you see Ned McCool?" asked Hubert, of a friend he met.

"No.—Why?" was the questioning reply.

"Because I think he'll fight the Clinker."

Hubert well knew the report would spread like a prairie on fire, though it would be kept from the Clinker's friends; and that was what he wished, and to have the peasantry prepared for emergencies also.

The "thimble" man, the dancer, the fiddler, and the jobber; the auctioneer, the Calcraft "Punch" and the often-hanged-yet-always-living "Judy"; all were present in prosperously superfluous abundance. But above all there towered up the tall "loop" man, "Big Pether," as he was commonly named by the people, and known to be a "big druth." Peter was never known to miss a fair-day in Moneyfin; he was always gathering in the halfpence, but was never seen even middlingly clothed, there being too great an attraction between his mouth and "a drap o' the crathur." Poor Peter was like many people in the world, able to earn money plenty; but he was also like a great many others, unable to keep it. Loud and strong resounded Peter's cry through the fair:—"Come along, lads, an' sport yer hapence. It's only a hapenny a time, an' ye have yer chance to win all on the board, an' only loss a hapenny. Come along, lads; here I am these forty years past, sportin' myself on a net capital of two thirteens, an' haven't more nor halved it since. Come along, lads; come along; only a hapenny a throw!"

Thus he shouted, and had succeeded in gathering a large crowd around him as Hubert approached.

The square of the town was a large triangle, notwithstanding

Eaelid's saying to the contrary. Along one of the sides Big Peter had put up his little table, and, stretching away to his right and left, moved or stood the idling crowd, while behind him was the busy hum of the busiest, throngest portion of the fair. The crowds to the right and left were the two excited religious parties of the district. Owen Slevin was there in all his majesty; and there, too, was big Brian Malone. And the opposite, opposing crowds laughed and joked and taunted, watching each other, though, all the time, like a pair of angry lions, both ready and seemingly anxious for the attack, yet each unwilling to be the aggressor or to give the first unbearable affront. At this moment Big Peter left his table in charge of one of the townsboys, and stalked across to Mrs. Gallagher's public house, which was right before him, his tall, gaunt figure conspicuous to all around. He returned immediately, bearing in his hand a humming naggin glass of the fatal whiskey; and, taking his usual position behind his little table, his countenance grim, fierce, and determined, he raised the glass on high, and in his stentorian voice, exclaimed:—

"Boys,"—a slight pause by the speaker, and a stretching forward of necks by the crowds, while a muttered—"I'll give them a toast, an I die for it" from Peter intensified the excitement among those immediately around the table:—"Here's to the glorious"—a general movement among the multitude at this expression, and Peter elevated his glass still higher, as he made another pause, and then continued: "pious, and immortal memory of"—a fierce compression of the lips, a wildness of the eyes, a grasping of something under the coats, a general surging of the crowds, a deep-toned, portentous rumbling, and a death-bearing determination on every countenance; while whispers of, "Is this the kin' o' Petther?" "A didnae think Petther woz o' that soort!" "Hae ye the cowlts ready?" "Min' yersels, an' dinna be cowards," denoted what the result would be, should Peter continue to give his toast, which he did after another short breathing-time, as if collecting himself for the scene that was to follow, while his concluding words were to be the signal for attack, and they came, after a long stare of

mingled carelessness and defiance of consequences;—"this glass o' Irish pottheen!"

The conclusion was so astonishingly unexpected, the expression of Big Peter's countenance was so amusingly quizzing, the earnestness of the opponents was now so doubly ludicrous, and the happy coolness with which the proposer of the toast took the whole scene was so apparently real, that a general burst of hearty laughter and cheering succeeded; rivalry was banished for the day, or became merged in the more important feature yet to come.

Hubert's attention was next caught by the tones of a ballad-singer, who was singing a ballad evidently composed specially for the edification of Oliver Huxtle, for the burden of the song related to the Clinker, and this it was that Hubert first particularly noticed. Hubert soon procured a copy, and read as follows:—

DOWN WITH THE CLINKER.

Hurrah for our country! we've praties and honey,
And lashins o' fightin', but faith, little money;
We've *drimindhus* plenty, an' blackthorns galore,
For meat an' for fightin'—what would ye have more?
For maidens we've love, an' for braggarts knock downs,
An' they who want more are but brutes—tare an' ouns!
So join in my chorus, ye farmers and tailors,
Ye blacksmiths, and sawyers, and brave brawny nailors,
Ye fiddlers and masons, and millers and tinkers—
Here's death or disgrace to all rascally Clinkers!

Hurrah for ould Ireland! her hills an' her mountains,
Her sweet rushin' sthrames an' her soft gushin' fountains,
Her broad fields so fertile, an' fair vales so pleasant,
Good home for a brave man, or baron or peasant.
Here's health to her maidens so good an' so pretty,
An' here's to her true sons so handsome and witty;
Success to her grocers, her sailors, her bakers,
Her soldiers, her butchers, her boot and shoe makers,
Professors and scholars an' all such deep thinkers—
But death or disgrace unto all braggin' Clinkers!

Come gather around boys and list to my song,
 You all in your true hearts to Ireland belong;
 For search the world over from China to Spain,
 You'll not find the aignal of Erin again:—
 With shamrocks, and roses, and lilies so white,
 And thistles galore, *we four countries unite* ;—
 Then long may it flourish, our "Isle of the Brave,"
 We've little to spend, boys; but, faith, less to save;
 So here's to our "Green Isle," in bumpers we'll drink her,
 But death or defeat to the swaggerin' Clinker!

Then nerve up your courage, an' screw down your fearin',
 An' prove to the world we have *men* in old Erin,
 An' ne'er be it said, either here or abroad,
 That a Saxon could beat every son of our sod!
 What care ye for bulk? 'Tis the heart, boys, the heart,
 That makes the true man shun the braggart's vile part,
 That strengthens the weary, gives pith to the blow
 To conquer for counthry, or boasters lay low;
 So here's to our island, may sorrow ne'er sink her,
 But deep in the sea pitch each frog-eatin' Clinker!

Hubert could not forbear smiling at the interest displayed by the people about the ballad; and from all quarters of the town, and all corners of the fair, could be distinguished cries or whisperings of "Death or defeat to the frog-eatin' Clinker!"

In a few minutes fife and drum were heard, and the approaching shouts and screams announced that the Clinker was marching in procession round the town. Such was the case. Every now and then, the procession and the accompanying crowd would stop, while a herald would proclaim:—"Here is the great English boxer, who fought seventy-three challenges, and was victorious in them all; and he now challenges all comers, Irishmen or niggers, black or white, to fight him in the market-square for the sum of fifty guineas! The great English boxer, who won seventy-three fights! Way—way—way, for the great English boxer!"

Thus the procession marched round the town and into the

diamond. At this moment, Hubert glided from the scene, quitting the crowd, and proceeded rapidly away; while Colonel Warburton and about forty men rode to the Clinker's side, where he stood in the centre of the square. A few of the soldiery now proceeded to form the indispensable accompaniment of all public fights—the ring; which they did by simply sticking a few poles into the street, and attaching ropes from one to the other. But, by some invisible hand—invisible, or at least unseen by the Colonel or his men—a ballad was stuck on every pole!

The Clinker soon after entered the ring, and the town clock struck three. As the last stroke sounded on the air, he began to strip, and in a few seconds he stood, arms folded, in fighting costume. He was truly a fearful looking opponent as he glared round on the gazing crowd in deadly hate and defiance; but especially when he noticed the ballad and saw that he was the principal object in it and not to his praise either, his countenance grew most Satanic indeed, and his body swelled out most extraordinarily, while his veins rose out in solid visible relief. His second stood beside him, and his herald again proclaimed the announcement about the "great English boxer" challenging all comers. The Colonel looked disappointed as no response answered the challenge. A second time rang out the herald's voice, but still no answer came, and the Colonel, the Clinker, and their favourites looked blanker, glummer and more disappointed. They expected that the negro would accept the challenge; and to kill him was the oath the Clinker swore when the Colonel departed from the barrack to the wake in Magheraporter.

For the third time the herald sounded the challenge:—"For the third and last time the great English boxer defies all comers, black or white, for the sum of fifty guineas,—will any one take him up? For the last time will any one take him up?"

The echo of the words yet lingered on the ear, when a loud voice at the outer side of the surrounding crowd about the ring, rang out in tones that sounded over all the square—"Here."

The multitude surged and swayed and opened; and through it, accompanied by the mayor of the town, rode Hubert Santley on Revenge. No one seemed to notice Ned McCool's arriving; but

when Hubert and the mayor pulled up on the side of the ring opposite to that where Colonel Warburton sat on horseback surrounded by his men, Ned stood by Revenge's head.

"Did you accept the challenge, Mr. Santley?" asked the Colonel.

"Are you Oliver Huxley's backer?" queried Hubert in turn.

"I am. Have you any objection?"

"None. My friend here"—and Hubert placed his hand familiarly on his foster brother's shoulder—"is going to try a tussle with your favourite; to try Irish blood against English. Edward McCool against Oliver Huxley," he continued, rising to his full height in the stirrups and repeating the names in a deep loud voice over the crowd, which took them up shouting the expression in reiterated cheerings:—"Ned McCool against the Clinker!" "Bravo Ned!" "Steek your sword in the hanimal's tail, Ned!" "Get him some frogs, Ned." "Give him frogs about the eyes, Ned."

At the conclusion of these shouts, which lasted only a few moments, Colonel Warburton again addressed Hubert:—

"It is usual, Mr. Santley, to deposit the forfeit—are you prepared to do so?"

"It is *not* usual, Colonel, to make the deposit beforehand, at least by those who accept the challenge; yet I already hold Mr. Santley's fifty guineas," said the mayor in reply.

"And here are mine, as backer for Oliver there. Would you feel inclined to risk another fifty on the first fall, Mr. Santley?" asked the colonel.

"Willingly, colonel. Here they are, Mr. Mayor, that England gets the first fall; and fifty more, colonel—are you willing to venture?—that she bleeds first?"

"Agreed, Mr. Santley; let us lose no more time."

Ned shook hands with Hubert, leaped into the ring by catching one of the stakes with his left hand and bounding in, while close at his heels sprang in Brian Malone, his second. A referee was chosen, and the men moved to business. At this moment Sir James Darcus and Sir Alexander Edwards were riding past the town, going from Rosedale towards Widow Mason's cottage in the glen.

CHAPTER XI.

"Do you keep a family register in your family, Edwards?" began Sir James Darcus, when he and Sir Alexander had got themselves comfortably seated in the latter's *sanctum sanctorum*, Master Benjamin having been shut out from the consultation, greatly to his disgust and chagrin.

"Certainly, Darcus—what a question! Why do you ask?"

"Let us see it. I wish to examine as to Master Benjamin's age."

So the great family Bible was handed down and examined, but, much to the surprise of the baronets, no entry relating to Sir Alexander's heir was found there.

"There may be something in the negro's story after all," was the mental comment of Sir James.

"'Tis most unaccountable!" exclaimed Sir Alexander.

The examination was repeated, and re-repeated; the leaf was held up between the gentlemen and the light, but no entry was discoverable of the birth.

"I pledge you my word of honour, Darcus," exclaimed Sir Alexander at length, "that with my own hands I inserted in this book the date of Ben's birth, and I have never removed it. How the vacancy occurs is beyond my comprehension—yes, totally incomprehensible."

"I believe you, Edwards. There seems to have been a leaf cut out here,"—the speaker was examining the book still;—"do you remember was the birth inserted on a separate leaf, or along with this announcement of your marriage?"

"There were three leaves in the Bible, Sir James; I got them specially put in; one of them was for notice of marriages, the second for births, and the third for deaths; and here now only two leaves—those for deaths and marriages—remain; the third,

with Ben's birth on it, must have been stolen. But come, let us go down and examine the church registry;" and the speaker strode away, followed by his visiter, both walking rapidly to the church, which stood only about a hundred perches from Rosedale House.

Arrived at the church, a searching investigation of the books there was gone through; but, more surprising still, the same disappointment was the result. After another patient and minute search, they had to give it up; determined that time alone would have to be given ere the truth could be found out. Suddenly it occurred to them to follow the pages of the registers. Their labours were rewarded,—a leaf was wanting; and by comparing the dates of the entries on the pages before and after the missing pages, they were both pleased and vexed to have to conclude that the lost leaf contained the entry for which they were so anxiously seeking.

"Was your child ever out at nurse, Sir Alexander?" suddenly demanded Sir James.

The other paused before replying.

"He was, Sir James. He was out for better than two years after his mother's death; as you may probably remember that the child's birth was her moment of decease. Come away back to the house, and let us examine the servants. Old Malone, the nurse, will be able to tell us every event connected with the child's babyhood. To me the omission is entirely unfathomable—a complete mystery." The speaker was in very earnest when he said this.

"Mrs. Malone, we have sent for you to ask you some questions about your young master's age—do you know how old he is now?"

Sir Alexander thus questioned the old nurse, when he had summoned her into the presence of Sir James and himself, on their return from their unsuccessful investigation at the church.

"Master Benjamin, your honour, is just twenty-seven, come the fourteenth of January next."

"Do you remember the time he was out at nurse, Mrs. Malone; or do you know who the nurse was, or where she is now?"

"It was my sister, Sir James, that nursed him; but she is dead now, poor Betty is."

"Betty what, Mrs. Malone?"

"Betty Mason, Sir James. Her husband died a few months after they were married, and she used to make what money she could at nursing. Through my interest and speaking to you, Sir Alexander, for her, she got the nursing of the young master, and had him for two years and two months, all but a few days."

A short pause.

"Mrs. Malone, by your hopes of an eternal salvation, do you know, or did you ever hear, anything of the child's being changed when it was out at nurse with your sister?"

Sir James stood up, and caught the old nurse by the shoulder, while looking straight into her face, sternly and anxiously, he put the question. He felt her tremble, and felt certain she was guilty; but she looked up in his face, and with an unmistakable expression of sincerity and truthfulness on hers which he could not doubt, she answered him, unmoved by his stern look or sterner manner.

"No, no, Sir James, I can answer you with a clear conscience about that. I never heard that thing mentioned in my life before. But now you talk about it, I'll tell you what my sister—poor Betty!—told me, that time she came to life again after her first death. I suppose ye both heard the story?"

"Yes—yes;—go on—go on."

Sir James was impatient. The old nurse continued.

"Yes, I thought so. Well, we were chatting one day, just ourselves two, after her betterness, and she says to me: 'Susy dear,' says she, 'I have something on my mind this long time, that I'll tell you about some day, and that'll make many a one wonder, but I'll not tell you now.' 'Why, Betty,' said I, 'you surely can have nothing on your conscience now, and you having so many sights when you were away in the other world?' She shook her head two or three times, your honours, and muttered,

'On my conscience, Susy? 'Deed and I have. If I told it new, I'd spend the last days of my life in the jail, maybe. No, no, Susy, when I am dead and away, there'll be wonderful things heard, for it's all written out with my own hand, and is lying well taken care of in my own house.' I never saw her since willing to talk of it. She always said it would be found out after her death. The last time I saw her we had a little quarrel, and that's a year or two ago, but she sent for me on her death-bed, and I didn't go, for I didn't think she was so near her end till I heard about two hours ago, that she died early this morning."

"And she died only this morning, Mrs. Malone?"

"Only this morning, Sir James. Poor Mary Carlin!—Heaven bless her handsome face for it!—was sitting up with her last night all alone, and she sent me the news. I was just going to ask leave, master, to go down and sit by the body awhile,"—continued the nurse, putting her apron to her eyes,—“when you sent for me to come up.”

"Yes, you may go, Mrs. Malone, Sir James and I will ride over after you, when we get some lunch, which you may as well order up as you go down. You will have no objection, I hope, that we may search your sister's house for the papers your sister mentioned, as they may give us some information we require among the wonderful things she mentioned as resting so heavy on her conscience?"

"Indeed you may search as much as you like, Sir Alexander, for I am her only living relative now; and I give you any permission I can give, to go and search and satisfy yourselves."

"Well, hurry off, then, nurse, and be there before us. In the lonely little cabin in the glen, is it not?"

"It is; the lonely looking cottage in the glen below Heather Hall—you must know it, Sir James?"

"Yes—yes—we'll find it. Hurry off, however, and don't delay too much by the way. You needn't mind going through the town, as it is fair day there," warningly replied Sir James, as the nurse hurried from their presence.

In less than two hours the two baronets arrived at Widow Mason's cabin in the glen, where they found Mrs. Malone just sitting down after entering, she having scarcely waited to take a look at the corpse, so tired was she after her walk from Sir Alexander's. The only living person in the house besides the nurse when the baronets entered was Mary Carlin. Scarcely noticing the charitable girl, and only waiting for the glance of admission or consent which they asked by their looks from Mrs. Malone, the gentlemen began their search. Mary sat on the same little seat and almost in the same position, as those she occupied when startled by her visiter, Colonel Warburton, some hours before; and the nurse sat on the bedside, gazing sorrowfully at the calm features of her dead sister's countenance.

And the searchers sought round the cabin for the papers. All round the dresser, above, below, and on it; in the fissures and holes in the walls; under, in, and about the bed; through the little room; in the old chest, in the cracked cupboard, in the creaking, wrecked old press; through two or three old books; in the roof, on the top of the walls, everywhere through the house; outside it and inside it, rummaged the gentlemen in their keen search, but nothing pertinent was found; no paper was forthcoming to throw light on Betty's expressions to her sister.

"Come, Edwards, let us go over all again."

And they did. With the same result.

Wearied, dusty, thirsty, annoyed, and disappointed, the baronets approached the two women, having unwillingly come to the conclusion that any further search for the papers in that cabin was only so much useless labour and so much waste of time. So they told Mrs. Malone that they believed there was no such paper as her sister mentioned in that house.

"Then I wonder where poor Betty could hide what she talked about; for surely, surely, your honours, she wrote the paper, or she'd never have told me she wrote it,"—the nurse responded in such a tone as to show that she was convinced the paper was written, and carefully stowed away in some secret place.

"What is it, Mrs. Malone?"

It was Mary Carlin who put the question, and the interrogation was the first sentence she uttered from the moment the gentlemen entered the kitchen.

"They want some papers, Mary, that she,"—and the nurse, as she answered, nodded towards the corpse,—“told me one time about. She said that something very wonderful would be found out after her death; that it was all written down on paper with her own hand. The master and Sir James think they know what she meant, and they wish to get the paper she told me about writing.”

“Just before Mrs. Mason died this morning, nurse,” returned Mary, quietly eschewing the presence of the gentlemen altogether, “she made a motion of pointing under her head. I searched under her pillow, and discovered a lump of papers which I handed to her, but she nodded me to read them. I read what was on the outside, and she watched me; and I thought she was uneasy, so I stooped down and whispered in her ear. She smiled up in my face, and died in a few minutes after;” and the speaker produced a good-sized roll of paper, much faded and crumpled.

Both gentlemen snatched simultaneously at the manuscript which Mary Carlin thus exposed before them. They were now at the end almost of their search, and the mystery would be solved immediately, they mentally reasoned. But what their astonishment was may be more easily imagined than described, when Mary, instead of submissively handing the roll over to them, drew back from their outstretched hands, holding the disputed, coveted paper firmly in her grasp.

“Not yet, gentlemen,” said Mary; “on the outside of this paper is plainly written ‘whoever gets this paper first is not to let it be opened unless four magistrates are present.’ This is a voice from the dead, gentlemen, and I mean to obey it, more particularly, too, as I am satisfied that Mrs. Mason knew and was pleased that I had taken charge of her paper for her.”

“I believe, however, madam, you can have no objection to our examining that paper without our opening or reading it?”

Mary's first impulse at this moment was to hand the speaker the manuscript, but some mental prompting whispered differently, and this impulse from within she followed.

"I must even refuse that, Sir Alexander."

"And must we wait your pleasure, young lady, to see the contents of that paper, which may concern our affairs so closely?"

"Even so, Sir James. You are not here now in your magisterial capacity, nor have you been requested to attend here at this stage by any of those engaged. Some hour since, I sent a messenger to beg both of you gentlemen, with the mayor and the rector, to attend here, as the four magistrates to be present while the opening of Mrs. Mason's paper takes place. If you will please to remain a little, my messenger will soon be back, I expect, and may, perhaps, have the other two magistrates with him."

"If I pledged my word of honour to return you that paper safely, Miss Carlin, when my friend, here, Sir James, and I would examine it, would you permit us to ease our minds of the important matter annoying us by permitting us to read it?"

"A death-bed request, Sir Alexander, is more sacred than even the word of an honourable man; and it is such a request that makes me refuse to give up the paper unless as mentioned."

An angry reply rose to the lips of the cowardly Baronet, Sir Alexander; while a muttered curse escaped from the choleric one, Sir James. It was an unusual thing for them to be thus braved. Each felt the refusal the more sharply from the other's presence; yet both felt that to yield quietly was the wisest course, so they moved towards the door, resolved to walk about a little outside and await the arrival of their brother magistrates, who should soon arrive if they intended coming at all with a speed proportional to the urgency of the messenger.

The Baronets encountered Master Benjamin in the doorway as they passed out; and as they moved off a few paces from the dwelling he entered.

"I have heard the conversation about that paper, Miss Carlin, and I must have it, as I feel sure it refers to me most particularly."

He spoke hastily and jerkily, as if he felt ashamed of being in such a predicament. As if some external force were compelling him to thus conduct himself, contrary to his inclination or his better nature. Assuredly, whatever his faults or his virtues were, he was far from being in love with his present delicate position. Nor was his dislike lessened by Mary's response.

"What a gentlemanly business for a Baronet's son and heir, to act the spy upon his father's words and actions! But I might expect no better after your conduct here this morning!"

"I am not here to bandy words with you. I heard my father and Sir James talking about something important to me at Rosedale, and I followed them on. I heard also what they and you said here, and I tell you again I must have that paper. Give it to me, or I may be tempted to do something dangerous."

"Better call on Colonel Warburton to assist you in abducting it, as you were going to assist him this morning; for I fancy, Master Benjamin, you are not hero enough to make me hand over to your single self what I refused to the joint requests of your parent and Sir James Darcus."

The allusion in this sentence to the morning's adventure seemed to madden him outright, and to goad him into a dangerous passion. His countenance began to work convulsively. With a thick, choking, guttural utterance, he fiercely demanded:—"Will you give me the paper?"

"Would Mrs. Mason's spirit not appear to me every night, and torment me every day, for acting so contrary to her last wishes?"

"Give me that paper."

"Could I ever again have a day's peace, or a night's sleep, Master Benjamin, if the honest, farewell wishes of the lonely, dying widow were not attended to properly by me?"

"Give me the paper."

"You know, Master Benjamin, a widow's curse or a widow's blessing is of more weight than any other person's would be?"

"Powers of darkness! do you want me to kill you? Give me that paper."

"What would your father and Sir James think of me if I gave you it; after refusing it to them?"

"Compulsion excuses anything. Give me the paper."

"But you'll not compel me to give it up? Will you?"

"By Heaven, but I shall; and quickly too, if you don't give it to me. Will you, or will you not, give it to me peaceably?"

"Never!"

"But you will, as sure as there's a devil on earth or an angel in Heaven."

And the cowardly ruffian advanced towards her.

"Once more I demand that paper, and be sure that your denial will be what I shant endure in silence or safety."

"You can't have the paper, Master Benjamin Edwards."

He drew a pistol, and presented it towards her, exclaiming:—"Give me that paper, or I'll take it from your dead body!"

"From mine first, Master Benjamin," sounded a manly voice at his very ear, while at the same instant his pistol was snatched from his hand, and a firm grasp caught him by the shoulder with a grip that made him wince under the pressure. He twisted himself round, and beheld the excited countenance of his captor, Ned McCool, from whose penetrating grasp his utmost strugglings and exertions were unable to free himself.

"Down on your knees, and beg her pardon," exclaimed Ned, his honest countenance, determined, unrelenting, angered—"down, you base cowardly cur, or by the powers that rule us, the pistol that you threatened another's life with will give yourself your death bullet, you hungered-looking hound you! Down, I say. Down, will you. Down, and thank Irish principle, or you should put your neck under my heel too. Down, I say. Was last night's punishment—ay, you may well start—I heard of that scene this morning!—was it not enough for you? or would you like another airing on the barrack wall? But down, or — oh, then, I must compel you!"

Mary afterwards expressed how delighted she felt to see the four magistrates entering at that moment, as she never saw Ned so excited, she said, and feared he would forget his usual prudence so far as to do Master Benjamin some injury.

"Why, McCool, how is this?" asked the mayor, as he entered the kitchen; "one might think you had fighting enough to-day already."

"I thought so myself, Mr. Mayor; but when I came into this cabin where a dead body lay, and found this man—this cowardly dog—presenting a pistol to Miss Carlin's head, and swearing to shoot her, I could not avoid interfering; and I have been requesting him to go on his knees and beg her pardon, before I let him go free."

"Your punishment is not too severe, McCool," returned the mayor; "and I join in the demand. I shall feel bound to commit him should he persist in his silence."

"It is highly merited," added the rector.

The father and intended father-in-law were silent.

"I'll see you all, and her too, in the lowest regions before I demean myself to do it," growled out the hopeful youth.

"Maybe not," replied Ned, whom this consignment of Mary to the "lowest regions" greatly angered. He scarcely rose to his full height; but, putting a hand on each of Master Benjamin's shoulders, and slightly striking him on the back with his knee, he bore him to the floor, compelling him to retain the kneeling position. Then, standing behind him, he put his open palms round his prisoner's throat, so that the tips of the fingers met on the "Adam's apple," while the thumbs were pressing tightly into the little hollows at the under parts of the ears. Ned stood for a little in this position, and slowly tightened his grasp on the other's throat.

"When you repeat as I say, Master Benjamin, I'll let you off. Not sooner. Say this—I regret what has passed, Miss Carlin; and I pledge you my word of honour not to annoy you again."

"Absurd," muttered Sir Alexander.

"Perfectly correct," said the mayor.

"Not too strong, and yet to the point," was the rector's comment.

Sir James kept silent.

Mary looked on, half benumbed, half amazed, fearing for the result, yet not liking to interfere.

Mrs. Malone crouched by the dead body, wishing it was all over, but scarcely daring to look up.

The man on his knees compressed his lips tighter, and remained mute, while his captor tightened his grasp.

"I regret what has passed, Miss Carlin, and I pledge you my word of honour not to annoy you again," spoke Ned, in a low, deep, ominous tone in his prisoner's ear.

The face swelled and blackened; the veins rose into blue relief; the grasp grew tighter, but Master Benjamin was in one of his worst and most pertinacious moods, and obstinately remained silent.

Blacker and bluer became the face; the eyes grew reddened and redder, and the veins swelled into fuller, bolder relief, while Ned again whispered, "I regret what has passed, Miss Carlin, and I pledge you my word of honour not to annoy you again," but the same silence was the result.

None moved or spoke. No one present seemed to see to the end of the trial. Ned was determined; Master Benjamin was dangerously obstinate. What the result would have been it is difficult to determine had Mary not interfered. She suddenly started as if from a trance; and stepping up to Ned she placed her hand on his arm, looking beseechingly in his face, while she softly and lowly whispered him. —

CHAPTER XII.

When Ned McCool bounded into the inside of the ring in the market-square, followed by his second, Brian Malone, he threw off his coat and vest, and appeared clad in a tight-fitting white shirt without sleeves, pretty tight white stockings,—for the peasantry of the North of Ireland had not then become accustomed to wearing trousers, and stockings and breeches were the leg raiment,—whitish breeches, and light neat shoes. He and Oliver stood looking at each other for fully twenty seconds. His countenance wore that smiling, comic, defiant expression so common and so proverbial among Irishmen; as much as to say:—"Well, old chap, how are your four bones this fine day? And what do you think of me and my shape?"

Oliver's face broadly and plainly proclaimed, not only to Ned but to all the surrounding crowd to whom his face was distinctly visible:—"How foolish you are to venture yourself against me! Don't you know you'll have no chance with me? I, who have never yet met my match, though I fought and won seventy-three fights, to be hearded by you! By Heaven, I'll smash you into mince-meat!"

As the two men stood, thus prepared for the fight, the comments of the crowd on their relative appearance, and on the comparative chances of each to win, furnished the best description which could be given of them.

"The Clinker's the heaviest," said one.

"But Ned's the activest, I bet," replied the person addressed.

"Ay, an' the Clinker's far the strongest," commented another.

"An ounce of lead wud kill a bull," was the objection.

"Look at the size of the Clinker's arms and fists."

"Yes, but see how wiry and clean Ned's are."

"And the Clinker has so much practice."

"What's practice against pluck and science."

"But what if the Clinker has them too?"

"Is it an English bull-dog to have as much pluck as an Irish-man, like Ned McCoel? No. Whatever fights the Clinker won, it was by brute strength, and neither by pluck nor skill."

"The Clinker's far the biggest," commented one in another part of the crowd.

"An' what o' that? Isn't ten inches o' our oak worth ten feet o' boortree in a man's fist in a row?"

"The Clinker is powerful looking," said another.

"And Ned is fearless looking," was the response.

"See the Clinker's eye, how it glares."

"Ay, but look at Ned's, how piercing it is."

Such-like expressions passed through the crowd, while Ned and the Clinker stood watching each other.

"Are you going to keep me waiting all day?" growled out Huxtley.

"Faith, I'm ready," answered Ned, stepping forward in his free-and-easy, careless manner, and offering his opponent his hand in the usual style. The Clinker indignantly slapped it aside with a muttered anathema.

"That's the worst blow Oliver Huxtley ever struck," whispered Hubert to the mayor, as he noticed the flash of Ned's eyes and the compression of his lips at the Clinker's ill-timed stroke.

The referee gave the signal; the crowd surged forward to see the first fall, and the men approached.

As they came into position, the Clinker retreated about two yards, drew his right elbow against his side, his right arm at right angles almost to his body, and his left bent across before his breast as if for parrying, both hands firmly clenched. And then with a single panther bound, he rose and leaped straight at his opponent, shot out his right hand with a force of annihilation, which would have wrecked a man's life for ever had it struck him, and put Ned from further fighting during his days had he met it, for it was treacherously directed for his very heart. With an agility the more surprising from the suddenness, treachery, and peculiarity of the attack, Ned sprang to one

side, and the Clinker's hand clove through air, himself dragged on by the impetus. As his gigantic body shot past, Ned revolved on his right heel, and his right hand, open, followed, too swiftly for the Clinker to shun it or recover his guard, and too well aimed, quick as it was, to miss its object. It caught the Clinker on the back of the head, right over the brain, stretching him senseless on the street; while from his nose, mouth, and eyes, gushed forth streams of blood.

The fight was over, and Ned McCool was the winner.

There will likely be found some who will say that Ned's blow was a treacherous, unmanly one. Let them consider before making such an assertion; for if they admit such a thing, they must likewise admit that his antagonist's opening attack was dangerously aggressive, unfair, and totally contrary to all the established rules and customs of scientific boxing. Though we acknowledge that "*Do as ye would be done by*" is a principle of which no one can deny the beauty, yet "*Do as you are done by*" is no unwise maxim either, and is one oftener followed in real everyday life than the other. That Ned would have followed the former precept is certain; to follow the latter he considered himself perfectly justified—and who will deny it?—from the illicit provocation he received. There was no fencing, no feinting, no parrying between them. The Clinker made the sudden leap, and shot out the deadly blow; Ned sprang aside, his right hand clove through the air, and caught the Clinker's cerebellum, and the fight was over!

The Clinker never again fought another such challenge. He was heard saying afterwards that he never knew his favourite attack to miss before, when given at the commencement of a fight. He lay senseless for nearly an hour after the blow, and had to be carried to the barracks, in which he was confined for many days before he was able to move through the town, go on any duty, or even give his usual attendance to the Colonel's affairs; not to the Colonel himself, for it will be found that that gentleman disappeared from the scene for a time, and his servant was, consequently, relieved from attending on him.

Ere Colonel Warburton and his men moved from the scene of the fight, or got the Clinker carried away, the mayor handed the three hundred guineas to Hubert. The latter immediately rose in his stirrups and addressed the crowd.

"Boys, Ned McCool has won. He has whipped the great English boxer! All of you go down to Jermy M'Laughlin's, or to Mrs. Gallagher's, or to Hegarty's public house, and you'll find open houses there; for I left word in them a while ago that Ned McCool would win, and for them to treat all hands. Drink the conqueror's health, but keep steady, and don't fall out. Here's to Ned McCool!"

"Ned McCool! Ned McCool!" shouted the crowd. "And to Hubert Santley, too, boys!" shouted the well-known voice of Brian Malone, and again and again uprose the thrilling shouts of gladness.

"Chair him, boys! chair him!" yelled out Owen Slevin. And the crowd seized on the suggestion with one united, prolonged acclaim; and capturing Ned, sorely against his will, as he sprang out of the ring, they carried him on their shoulders in triumph round the town, Brian,—burly, big, good-humoured, brawny Brian Malone,—leading and heading the triumphal procession.

Our hero, freed from the hearty but boisterous welcomings of his greeting friends, sped off as soon and as rapidly as possible to widow Mason's, to see Mary Carlin. It has been seen how opportunely he arrived there, and how he was punishing Master Benjamin for the attack on Mary, compelling him on his knees to beg her pardon, when she interfered, whispering, as has been seen, to Ned—

"For my sake, Ned, let him go."

Not the four magistrates in the cabin could have made Ned loosen his hold against his will had they thrown themselves upon him together, and yet at Mary's request, his hands instantly released Master Benjamin's throat.

For Ned was he whom Mary had so persistently refused, though loving him with the warmest, deepest, most lasting love her heart could entertain; and he now somehow fancied, that

the granting of this act of mercy would cease Mary to be to him all he wished. And he was amply repaid for the self-denial he underwent in permitting his prisoner to escape, by the glance of thankful gratitude and satisfaction she gave him when she saw the man she had pleaded for rise and move to the door.

But she almost regretted her intercession when she saw its object turn at the door, shake his fist at all in the cabin, and with a demoniac look which included all the party he was leaving, exclaimed:—"I'll have my revenge of the whole cursed lot of you yet." With this farewell, he departed, and proceeded rapidly towards Moneyfin.

Arrived at the town, he hastened to the barracks, and found that Colonel Warburton, for whom he enquired, was just then dining, having only a little before returned from the fight. Without introduction or ceremony, Master Ben burst in on the Colonel; and in reply to the friendly invitation to share the dinner, he abruptly demanded:—"How much am I in your debt, Warburton?"

The Colonel could not tell him just then, as he had not impressed the amount on his memory, but what matter? There was no need for hurry. He was in no need of money, having that day received a legacy of five thousand pounds.

This explanation would not satisfy Master Benjamin.

"I'm not going to pay you, though I'm enquiring about my debts. Did you hear that they are going to bring me in as some farmer's son or worse, and that I'm not an Edwards at all? If this should prove true, where are your chances to get the thousands you lent me?"

"But who can prove it?"

The Colonel seemed roused now.

"Why it seems that the old hag whose house we met in last night—curse them all!—was nursing me, or nursing Sir Alexander's child,—as the mother had died in childbirth,—and that she changed me for some other child. She had taken an oath or something like one never to tell the names of the people interested while she lived; but, curse her, she has it all written out, and it has been found, and I am after leaving my father,

Sir James Darcus, the mayor, and Rector Snodgrass, as four magistrates, reading the manuscript, and I suppose when they get through it, their first business will be to tell me I'm only some farmer's or beggar's brat, hardly knowing father or mother, or maybe worse!"

"But what can I do in the matter?"

"What can't you do, rather than lose your money?"

"If I fear to lose my money, Edwards, I'll have your body in lieu! Never fear but I will," warned the colonel, thoroughly excited.

"Pshaw, man, what nonsense! Don't you know no judge, court, nor jury in the British Empire would make you my body in lieu of your money, when I ceased to be the person to whom you lent your cash, or lost my position? Besides, you dare not expose yourself so; for if it came to a trial, all the means of outlay opened to me—and *you* know what they were?—would be exposed. No, no, Warburton, you must either help me to swim, or both of us sink together as far as my debts to you are concerned!"

"And what do you propose? I know you have something in your head; for I'll be much disappointed if you've no plot hatched in your brain before coming my length!"

"I could make it all out, if I only knew who I am; in other words, if I only knew who is to step into my shoes, if any one. I'd let *him* be lost for a few months or years."

"No murder, Edwards! Remember, I can have no hand in assisting you, even to gain all the money we ever spent together, much less the few thousands you owe me, if there be any bloodshed, that is, murder, to be in the carrying out of the plot."

As the colonel thus warned his companion, there were real horror and terror depicted in every feature of his countenance, for once more rose up before him the curse of the peasant girl's mother as vividly as the moment of its occurrence.

Master Benjamin bounded off his seat.

"I wouldn't risk his life, whoever he may be," he exclaimed; "nor spill one drop of his blood, should my body rot in the deepest dungeon that ever cursed or cumbered the earth. Listen, Colonel

Warburton. I am often bad, and wicked, and dangerous; but sometimes a better nature that is in me predominates, and I then shun evil; in this mood am I now, and while I remain so I wouldn't move hand or foot to save myself, but to pay you the debts—and thank Heaven, they are the only ones I owe—I owe you; whether honest debts or not I leave you to judge. Nay, hear me out, and I'll then reply to you how, or when, or where you choose. I say that I would make no movement in this matter for the purpose of retaining my present position, but only to get you your money; for I know that my father—Sir Alexander Edwards—would never permit me to want no matter how poor my real parents may be; but I tell you I'll leave no stone unturned to seize whatever the other one—the real heir—is, and to hold him in private captivity in some secret stronghold for a few years. During this time I shall gather, by some means or other, sufficient to pay you; and then to the devil or the negro with you and your accursed drinking and gambling; for, for the wealth of a mine, I wouldn't live the last three or four years over again, among such gaming and debauchery as your hellish soul led me into!"

The colonel leaped to his feet, and drew his sword from its scabbard where it had been thrown on a sofa:—"You insulting, unshapely clown, how dare you use such expressions to me? But what better could I expect from such a usurping plebeian!" he ejaculated.

Master Benjamin drew a pistol, cocked it, and presented it towards his companion, as the latter was preparing to make an attack on him, warningly exclaiming:—"By Him who made us, if you take two steps in this direction you are a dead man. I lost one pistol this day already, and I'll now chance my life on this one. Beware now! 'Clown!' indeed! Who was the greatest clown last night, I wonder?"

Nothing cools a coward as readily as danger, that is, real danger; and Colonel Warburton, though occupying the position of colonel in his Majesty's army, was a coward at heart! Do you deny that, dear reader! You do! And how can you reconcile real courage with such conduct as we have seen the colonel

guilty of? No, no, reader mine
 tacks females, much less lonely
 table ones keeping watch and g
 And yet of such a nature was
 such a man was a coward at
 pointed at him he cooed dov
 laugh, threw his sword on th
 pacifically addressed the y
 "Come, come, Edwards, I
 me. The defeat of my se
 news of my uncle's sudd
 know I'll assist you; f
 together till my money
 plan I'll support it, wh
 discover that mystery
 at. Have you no ide

"I have a dim not
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At this mome
 attention of our
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"Edwards, I
 the mayor and
 together. Th
 want to see ei
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"Be seated, gentlemen;" and the Colonel handed them seats, or pointed ones out to them; "I am not often visited by so many of my brother magistrates."

"And you are probably surprised at our visit, Colonel," replied the mayor, taking the lead in the conversation. "Things of curious importance have been this day discovered which tend towards changing the present family arrangements of my friend here, Sir Alexander. We are unable to clear up the mystery fully, and have reason to conclude that your servant, Huxtle, may be able to throw some light on the affair,—can we see him?"

"Certainly, Mr. Mayor, you can see him, but he is not yet sufficiently recovered from the effects of the fight, to be able to converse, or talk anyway sensibly."

"So I said just now, colonel," continued the mayor; "but I was overruled; it being suggested even that perhaps you yourself could throw some light on our yet dim information?"

"As I do not know the particulars to which you refer, or which you seek," wilyly returned the colonel, "I cannot say that I am able to supply any missing link."

"The whole thing amounts to this, colonel," recklessly interposed Sir Alexander; "and see if you can help us. A tall negro"—the colonel in the front room, and Master Benjamin in the back one, started,—"came to my friend here, Sir James, this morning, and told him something casting doubts on the reality of Benjamin's being my son. We then sifted up anything we could to prove the truth or calumny of the story; and, strangely enough, the more we examined the more were we astonished to find confirmations of the negro's tale at every turn. Our search led us to old Widow Mason's"—again the colonel and Master Benjamin started—"and there, in a paper she wrote to ease her conscience, she confesses that my child, which she had got out to nurse, was indeed changed, and another, some farmer's brat, substituted in its stead. She had reason, at one time, to suppose that young Santley was my rightful heir, but found out from certain marks on his neck that he was really Santley. Then another scrap of paper turned up which, it was

supposed, belonged to your servant, Oliver Huxtley; so, thinking he could help to explain, off we came here, and now, curse it, we are as far off as ever, it seems!"

Sir Alexander jerked out every word of this as though it were some disagreeable task he had imposed on himself, and would be unhappy until it were accomplished. He certainly was in no placid mood during that day's investigation; he had no love for the business at all; he wished it had never turned up, and cursed the negro for bringing it before Sir James's notice, Sir James for troubling him with it, himself for permitting it to annoy him, and the whole world nearly, since circumstances were displeasing to his sense of happiness and repose.

"I am really sorry, Sir Alexander, that my servant is so ill, as I would use my persuasions to yours, to get from him anything he may know regarding this annoying question. But may I ask how it happened that his name came into the plot during your search?"

How innocently the wily colonel put the question! As if he didn't well know how Huxtley's name turned up!

"Some scrap of paper fell into our hands, colonel," answered the mayor, taking the word from Sir Alexander; "and his name is pretty plainly mentioned in it as being the person in this country who has special charge of the secret. Hence we reasonably concluded he might know much, and with your assistance, and by paying him well, we hoped he would give us sufficient to guide our searches in the right direction at least."

"The more especially, colonel," added the rector, "that this same scrap of writing seemed to elucidate clearly some mystical portions of Widow Mason's manuscript. But it seems," continued his reverence, "that our investigation is ended for the present, and that we can proceed no further until this Huxtley recovers sufficiently to be competent to give evidence."

And when he be, mentally resolved the colonel, he will be out of the reach of examination.

"And when he be, gentlemen," he spoke aloud now, "you may be assured I shall investigate the matter with the greatest trouble and in the strictest way I can."

"Oh, we are certain of that, colonel," responded the mayor; and now I believe, gentlemen, I must take my leave of you all, as I have been requested to attend at Magheraporter at five o'clock,"—and the speaker consulted his watch—"to get the deceased Miss Porter's will read. As she was the last of her family, there is wonderful excitement among the knowing ones as to which of her favourites she will bequeath her property, though if I am to judge from the hint her old servant gave me, there will be surprise and dissatisfaction at the disposal she has made."

The four magistrates then took their departure; and the colonel unlocked the door to release Master Benjamin, but was astonished to find two gentlemen, instead of one, walking out from his bedroom!

CHAPTER XIII.

On the party in Widow Mason's cabin, after the unrepentant Master Benjamin's defiant exit, there fell a short but uneasy and complete silence. It was broken at length by the mayor.

"I understand, Miss Carlin, that you have business of importance to lay before us.—Can we proceed to it now?"

She answered by placing the manuscript in the speaker's hands, saying as she did so: "I resign this most willingly, Mr. Mayor, into your hands, as I think you are the senior magistrate present. Read the outside, and tell me have I done well or ill in refusing to give it up sooner?"

"You have acted most wisely, Miss Carlin," returned the mayor, when he read the superscription. "Gather around, gentlemen, and take notice that this seal is unbroken, until I break it, as I am now doing. But see, it is somewhat long; let us find seats while we examine its contents."

Mary managed to get them seats, and was then about to go outside,—she and Ned,—when the mayor stopped them; "Better remain, Miss Carlin; we may need your evidence as to the finding of this paper; and you also, McCool, may be required as witness. Take chairs, and Mrs. Malone too. And as we are sitting now in our magisterial capacity—are we not, gentlemen?—we had better proceed formally. So we may as well swear Miss Carlin as to the finding and preserving of the manuscript, and then we shall proceed to read it."

So Mary was sworn; but her evidence being similar to the information she had given the two baronets a little before, it need not be repeated here. The mayor then took up Widow Mason's paper, which he proceeded to read, and which was written in a plain, though stiff and shaky schoolgirl hand, and which

elicited from Mrs. Malone the remark, in response to the mayor's wondering at the neatness of the writing :—"Yes, your worship, my poor sister got a fair education when she was living in Belfast."

Looking round to see that all were attentive, and looking also at the corpse in the bed, the mayor began the paper.

BETTY MASON'S STORY.

I, Betty Mason, of my own free will, to ease and satisfy my conscience, write out this following story; and I vow, by my hopes to meet a merciful Judge in the next world, that I am telling nothing but the truth, and I am telling the whole truth about the affair as far as I know. And I also pray and beg that whoever may find this paper may see right done; for I believe my soul could have no rest in the world to come unless I could go to my grave thinking that the right would be done and the wrong undone some day. Well, then, when the good Lady Edwards died in giving birth to her first child, my sister, who was living in Sir Alexander's then, got me the nursing of the baby. A darling little thing it was—a little boy. It kept thriving bravely with me for some weeks, when all on a sudden I remarked it looking ill; and it grew on getting pale, and sick, and weak, and thin. Well, I didn't know what to do, and the poor dear little thing getting thinner and sicklier every day on my hands. I was sitting one day nursing it on my knees, and crying with downright vexation, when Mrs. Ramsay came in dressed, and carrying a fine male child in her arms, about the same age as my little Master Benjamin, but far healthier, and fine, and rosy, and stout. "Good day, Mrs. Mason," says she. "Good morning, Mrs. Ramsay," says I. "What ails your child this morning, Mrs. Mason?" says she; "it looks but poorly—poor little angel!" Her pity for the little thing took my heart at once, and I went off my guard. "'Deed, Mrs. Ramsay," says I, "I'm afeard my darling is going to do no good; it's sickening and pining away altogether, so it is." So she came forward to me and looked at it, and shook her head mournfully; and then she held down the infant she had, to compare the two, like; and

then she says, "What would happen you, Mrs. Mason, if that child would die in your charge? Sir Alexander would go crazy, more particularly now since he lost Lady Edwards." "'Deed and that's what frightens me, Mrs. Ramsay," says I; "Sir Alexander would have the life of me if his son and heir, and his only child besides, should die in my hands." "That's true anyhow, dear knows, Mrs. Mason," says she; "he's such a wild man these few weeks past that I wouldn't take all he's worth in the world and be in your shoes this blessed morning." When she said this I was so frightened entirely that I began to cry and rock the child in my lap. "What would you give, Mrs. Mason," says she, after watching me a little, "to a body that would help you to cure your baby, and make it that even Sir Alexander would be proud of your nursing instead of putting you in jail, and hanging you maybe for murdering his son; for you know, Mrs. Mason, that these magistrates can do what they like with us, poor people, and nobody to question them for it!" "That's true—that's true, Mrs. Ramsay," says I; "but where could a poor widow like me get any body that would do that much for me? I have only five pounds in the world, but I would give it all if you could cure my baby for me, and make it healthy and nice-looking again." So she said she would, but only for myself, just as if she had taken a great liking to me, and I gave her the five pounds, and then she told me that her method was to change the babies, and how no one would know, and how the baby she was nursing was belonging to a poor woman who was lying for death, and how she wouldn't care, as she would get the most of the money, and so on. At first I shuddered at the thought, but when she talked on a while, it didn't seem near so bad, and so at length I consented, and we changed the clothes on the children, and then she took Sir Alexander's child away with her after leaving me the one she had. But I soon begun to get unhappy, and I would have given five pounds more, ay, five hundred, if I had them, to get my own first little one back again. So I went and asked Mrs. Ramsay for it in the second day after, and I told her I would give her five pounds more if she'd give me my own back again, but

she only laughed at me, and told me she would tell Sir Alexander if ever I'd mention it to her any more. "A nice thing it would be," says she; "for me to give up my good secret that'll be bringing me in many a hundred, maybe many a thousand pounds yet, from Master Benjamin when he grows up and knows he is not the rightful heir. No, no, Mrs. Mason," says she; "keep your secret and I'll not tell on you. You have made your bed and you must lie in it." And so I did, and many a sleepless night I slept on it, tossing and turning and weeping and moaning for my crime. But the days and weeks went on, and my wee charge grew, and Sir Alexander came in a little better than two years to take his son away home, and he took what he thought was his own, and it grew to be a tall, curious, misshapen young man, and though the Baronet paid me well, and praised me for bringing him up such a fine healthy child, he never mentioned his odd appearance nor how awkward he was. Then I began to think of making restitution, and off I started in search of Mrs. Ramsay, for she had left the town a few days after we made the exchange of the children, and I hadn't seen her since, and that was years ago. So I searched after her husband, soldier Ramsay, and learned that he had been stationed in Moneyfin beyond, and was known among his comrades as Izzed Ramsay, though I never could find out why he was called by the last letter of the alphabet. So I went to the town and enquired at the barracks for him, and then I was told he had been changed to Dublin and was there now. Off I walked to Dublin, walked it every step, but when I got there I found there was two or three or four barracks in the city, so I was nearly as far off as ever. Then I went to one place and another and another and another, and I don't know how many till I found out Izzed Ramsay at last, and when I come at the soldier I wasn't long till I found out the soldier's wife. So I fell on my knees before them both and begged of them for God's own sake to tell me where my own baby was, but they only laughed at me and jeered me. And when I asked them whose child it was I had nursed up and given to Sir Alexander as his own, they cursed me and bid me give them no trouble about other people's brats. Then I begged

of them again with uplifted hands for God's own dear blessed Name not to let me die without knowing what happened Sir Alexander's real son, and I vowed that after my death, my ghost would follow and haunt them for ever and ever in this world if they would let me go to the grave with that sin upon my soul. Well, when I was on my knees they made me swear a fearful oath that I would never while I lived let a human being know the words they were going to tell me. I took the oath and kept it, for never have the words crossed my lips, but now I write them down so that the truth may be known some day. "*Go and find out,*" said Mrs. Ramsay; "*where I was nursing at the time that Lady Edwards died.*" "*And it's there the secret is,*" added her husband; "*and I wish you joy of it if you can make it out.*" They would give me no more satisfaction, so I had to come away again with what trifle I had got from them. But I didn't believe that my oath hindered me from trying to find out where Mrs. Ramsay was nursing at the time she mentioned, and so I set to work, and in every likely house in the town and country, I asked, without letting anyone think I was asking for any particular reason but just for female curiosity, like, who nursed such and such people, always asking for boys that was near the right age. I was beat for months and months, ay, years, till at last I found out one house that Mrs. Ramsay was nursing in at the time that Lady Edwards died. And that house was Mr. Santley's, and the babe I got was young Hubert Santley——"

Sir Alexander actually bounded upright off his seat when the mayor read this discovery. He was so excited that the rector rose, and placing his hand on the baronet's arm, warned him:—"Remember, my dear Edwards, that the wisdom of God never acts wrongly, and that this trial may turn out ultimately for your benefit. Come, take your seat till we hear the paper finished," and the baronet suffered himself to be led to his seat by the good clergyman, while the mayor continued to read:—

"The babe I got was young Hubert Santley, and Mrs. Ramsay gave the Santleys the real Master Benjamin Edwards. This must be it, I thought. I had come to the truth at length, and I

thanked God fervently for showing me the true child, and that night was the first good night's sleep I enjoyed from the day I let the babies be changed."

"Here there is evidently a break in the manuscript, gentlemen," said the mayor, stopping suddenly when he had read thus far; "the remaining portion is much clearer and fresher, both the paper and the writing; it has certainly been written at a date subsequent to that at which the portion I have already read was written."

"It is all very strange, and is coming on us quite unexpectedly," interposed the rector.

The baronets remained silent, Sir James erect with arms folded and crossed; Sir Alexander bent, his head leaning on his hands. Mary and Ned quiet and attentive, their eyes constantly meeting and as constantly cast down, only to repeat the same alternations immediately. Mrs. Malone seemed asleep in the corner.

The mayor proceeded with the manuscript.

"Alas, alas, that people should be so soon sure of a thing without right proof. I thought that from what I found out, as I have told at the end of the last piece, that I would have no more trouble; but it is now more than three years since I wrote it, and I spent most of that time in trying to make sure that Master Hubert Santley was the real heir of Sir Alexander Edwards, and that he who was known as Master Benjamin Edwards was only Mr. Santley's son. Well, I tried a good many ways, but failed in them all; so at last I determined to go and try to make out from Mrs. Santley herself if there could have been any chance of her losing her own babe or getting it swopped any way, and especially if her little son had ever been out at nurse, or if he had any marks on him that she would be sure of knowing him again, as I had seen many people in my day having marks on them. So I went over to her, and she chatted with me a good while, for she was a good kindly woman, God bless her, and reared a fine son; and so I asked her:—"Mrs. Santley," says I, "did you ever hear of children being changed when they were out at nurse and were only little infants?" "Indeed, I did, Mrs.

Mason," says she. "Would there have been any fear of that happening with your child, Mrs. Santley?" says I. "Oh, no, Mrs. Mason," says she; "not the least. And I'll tell you why. When I was carrying Hubert, and near the time of his birth, I was out walking in the garden one pretty stormy day, and it was summer. I was among the rossberry bushes, and was stooping to pull some that were low down, when one of the high ones was blown down by the wind and struck me on the neck. I started, and gave a scream, for I am easily frightened, but I thought no more of it till Hubert was born in three or four weeks after, when I was astonished to find the mark of a rossberry on his little neck in the same spot where the one struck me so lately before. There it was, Mrs. Mason, quite plain, and there it remained ever since. Every season when the rossberrys are ripe, the mark becomes redder and more like the real fruit; but in the winter the mark gets dim and is scarcely then visible. Oh, no, Mrs. Mason, no fear of Hubert being changed." And Mrs. Santley did more than this, for she even called in Hubert from where he was out riding a horse in the paddock, and made him show me the rossberry mark on his neck, and there it was that fine July evening as plain as the real fruit would be nearly. Well, God knows after this I was as far back as ever, and my sleepless nights came back on me again; and I fear now I'll go to my grave without finding out the truth; but I beg and beseech, for God's holy sake, that all you who hear this may try and discover the real truth, and do what's right by getting the real children to their own rightful places, and when that's done, maybe I'll be accounted freed from my crime, and my soul may then get to rest and happiness. And if the dead can do good for the living, I'll never cease doing good as far as I am able for them that'll do this affair out right for me. May they enjoy happiness here and hereafter.

"Here the manuscript ends, gentlemen," said the mayor, "and leaves us as mystified as ever. What would any of you advise to be done now?"

"Perhaps this may throw some light on the mystery, Mr. Mayor," said Ned, and he handed his worship the paper he had

shown that morning to Hubert, and which had been the principal means of bringing forth the investigation in Widow Mason's. It was read and examined in silence by each of the four magistrates.

"It seems patent to me," said the rector, "that the two papers bear a mutual explanation of each other in some portions. Permit me," and he reached for the widow's manuscript as he spoke; "here is a solution of what was a mystery to Mrs. Mason, if the papers can be considered as having reference to the same transaction. The 'Izzed' of which Mrs. Mason speaks is evidently a contraction for 'Zedekiah,' the name appearing in this smaller paper. And the 'R—y' of the small piece certainly suits the 'Ramsay' of the large manuscript, so that thus far that mystery is solved."

"Yes, but the reference to what we might translate as Hubert Santley in this small scrap does not hold good," objected the mayor.

"But it would," his reverence replied, "save for the latter portion of Mrs. Mason's paper. But stay," continued he, addressing our hero; "McCool, you have not yet told us to whom this paper you have produced belonged? That would, perhaps, give us an end of the clue, which might enable us to explore the mystery."

"I cannot say for certain," answered Ned; "but I have good reason to believe that it belonged to Oliver Huxley, Colonel Warburton's servant, otherwise known as the Clinker; and I think it's his name is meant by that blank in the corner."

"We'll go to him to the barracks."

It was Sir Alexander who so impatiently ejaculated the proposition; and as he spoke he rose, strode towards the door, and was on his horse before any one could prevent him. He was about galloping off alone when the mayor called on him to stop; and he then heard for the first time, with amazement on every feature of his and Sir James's countenances, the history of the Clinker's adventures at the fair, and of Ned McCool's whipping him at the fight, contrary to the expectation and hope of Colonel Warburton and the soldiers.

"But we can see him though, can't we?" Sir Alexander impatiently exclaimed.

"It will be useless," answered the mayor; "he had to be carried off from the fair, senseless. I had not even reached home when Miss Carlin's messenger came to me requesting my attendance here. So I know McCool's late opponent is too ill or too stupid just now to give us any information, even supposing he were either able or willing to do so."

"Well, if he cannot, perhaps Colonel Warburton may. Besides, our business here is finished, I think, and I am impatient till this mysterious affair be properly cleared up. Come away to the barracks," and the impatient Sir Alexander rode off, followed more leisurely by his brother magistrates, but not until the mayor had said:—

"You acted wisely in this case, Miss Carlin; and you, McCool, will, I trust, have no objection to my taking this paper of yours with me. I shall not permit it to go astray. Thank you."

When the gentlemen departed, Mary and Ned exchanged glances. During the investigation they had kept doing so; but it was under constraint. Now, however, they could indulge in that happiness without fear; and for a time the world and its troubles and its joys were alike forgotten. Mrs. Malone wisely went out for a stroll, "being so tired," she said, "with that long searching and reading."

Mary then, with wonder not unmixed with alarm and pride, heard the story of that day from Ned himself; while she, in turn, told him of her interview with the two Baronets and Master Benjamin before he arrived to relieve her.

"But, Ned, I'll never forgive myself for dragging you into a family like ours," said Mary, during their conversation; "I wish I could have remained on as cold as I was this time past, but I could contain myself no longer, when I saw how that unfortunate man was suffering from your grasp. Won't you forgive me, Ned? But how did you know I was changed?"

"Forgive you, Mary? Yes, if you promise never to say that again." And the forgiveness was pledged, as in such cases forgiveness usually is. "You ask me, Mary, how I knew you were

changed. Ah, darling, when the heart is full of a thought, the eyes speak true, ay, far truer than the lips ever can. It was your eyes, Mary, that told me so much when you looked up in my face and asked me to let him go. I knew then, Mary, you would grant me any time my long, long wished-for prayer."

"Do you mind the song you made me one time, Ned, about the eyes—about how true they speak?"

And low and soft and sweet, and with her liquid blue eyes upturned in loving, trusting faith to his, she slowly and feelingly repeated the following lines:—

THE LANGUAGE OF THE EYES.

Oh, the lips may lie, and a false tale tell,
And the tongue may utter untruths as well,
And the face no true index oft may be:—
E'en the pen from falsehood is not free;
And friends may fail and deceptive prove,
And coldness be ours from those we love,
But the eyes! the eyes!
We may trust the eyes!
They speak with a truth
That age nor youth
May doubt to index the secret that lies
Deep down in the heart,—yes, trust the eyes.

When the heart is full of a cherished thought,
And throbbingly beats for the treasure sought;
When the bosom glows with a truthful fire
Of feelings of love that never tire,
And the blood more swiftly courses along
In *her* presence we love with a love so strong,
Oh, then will the eyes
Speak the thoughts we prize,
While we struggle in vain
Their tale to restrain,
But they speak with a truthful, a magic spell,
And say that—we love—and—oh—so—well!

With what an unspeakable pathos of exquisite feeling did Mary utter the six last words! How slowly, softly, sweetly, lovingly, trustfully, did she repeat them! Her eyes filled with tears, but they were tears of happiness and joy, not of sorrow. She was happy in the certainty of Ned's constant affection; she was proud of his manliness, his softness, his good nature; and she was joyful because of his success at the fight that day in the fair.

"Did you hear, Mary, that your father's farm is for sale again?"

It was many minutes before Ned could bring himself to break the happiness of the silence.

"No, Ned; but what odds to us whether or not? The landlord wouldn't give it us, I suppose, again, after putting us out, even we were rich enough to buy it back."

"Probably not, Mary. Who's this the landlord is?"

"Doctor Raven, Elvingdon Manor, Cheshire."

"Do you know has he the property long?"

"He bought some of it about twenty years ago, and plenty of the remainder he had no right to more than you or my brother Johnny. The leases fell out, and then Dr. Raven came in and ordered and subpoenaed the tenants all to appear in Dublin to show their title. My uncle, you may mind, and one or two of the tenants besides, agreed to go, but the rest were bought over, and then it was too heavy for the few to appear; so the doctor stepped in, and the property became his. And some of the houses of the town became his in the same way at the same time, and more since. And some land that once belonged to the town for a common he took also, and built a wall round it, and now gets six or seven pounds a-year for it."

Ned was silent for some moments, when suddenly he exclaimed, "I wonder, Mary, how long it will be before Dr. Raven and his heirs lose every perch and every house they have gained in that foul way!"

"It won't be long, Ned; for I hear he is beginning to go down in the world already. But did you hear the last thing Sam Hewlines was trying to do? He wrote to the landlord that we

were going back to our old farm every night, and stealing everything we could get our hands on, and for us to be put out of the house we had got when we left the farm, for we had got so bad and dangerous that the neighbours couldn't live with us. Dr. Raven happened to have Hubert Santley with him in Dublin where the doctor was stopping when Sam's letter reached him, and Hubert proved how it was all a lie; and told the doctor the sort of a man the bailiff was; and now Sam's dismissed, and will soon be begging, for they say he has no money."*

"Serve him right, too, the undermining villain. It will only be just retribution if he be punished even in this world for all the evils he wrought on the tenantry. But tell me, Mary,"—and they proceeded to talk of matters more interesting and important to themselves than they would be to you, dear readers of these pages.

* These are facts that Mary relates.

CHAPTER XIV.

When Colonel Warburton unlocked the bedroom door to release Master Benjamin, he was astonished, as has been said, to find that gentleman not alone. The colonel's first impulse, astonishment, speedily gave place to a sterner feeling on perceiving who the stranger was; and his next motion was to the bell-pull, to ring for servants to seize the daring intruder.

"Stay, Warburton," said Master Benjamin; "hear me first, and you may act as you think fit afterwards."

"I shall hold no association with robbers and murderers," haughtily responded the colonel.

"Nor with gangsters or peasant girls," added the new-comer, whose presence galled the colonel so deeply. The blood fled from Warburton's face at this sentence, and he caught the back of the chair near where he stood.

But who was he thus curiously introduced from the bedroom, who so tauntingly showed a knowledge of the colonel's private life, and who had caused that officer to assert that he could "hold no association with robbers and murderers?"

Let us see.

For many years prior to the period during which the events described in this story occurred, the country for forty miles and more around Moneyfin was infested by bands of robbers. The leader of these was a man of about forty-five years of age, not at all bulky or herculean, but on the contrary slight, though exceedingly lithe, active, wiry, and surpassingly daring and hardy. He was bold in his attacks and generally successful. Like many another more famous bandit, he never injured the honest poor, nor did he ever spare the avaricious. Poverty, he said, was no disgrace, and needed assistance rather than loss; but the cruel, usurious, or tyrannous, he argued, when unwilling to help their

poorer neighbours, ought to be made to do so. For many, many reasons, the robber's real name is suppressed, but we shall speak of him as Henry Donaldson. Few in the North-west of Ireland, who are conversant, by memory or tradition, with the leading local celebrities of their district during the past seventy or eighty years, but will readily recognise the person depicted under the synonym of Henry Donaldson, of whom many good stories are related. The following one is often told among the peasantry, and is given always as an example of a Providential interference as guiding and ruling all our actions :—

Donaldson was attending a fair in Killyconner one day, and was sitting in his private room in the principal public house there,—for in every town or village in the district there was a private apartment of some particular public house or hotel devoted solely to the use of the robber—when he heard a most extensive cow-jobber counting his money, which amounted to seven hundred pounds, all but two or three. Now this man, Connolly by name, had on more than one occasion boasted how he defied the robber and didn't care two straws for him; and the latter determined to take revenge. Connolly, after counting his money, told his companion how he was going to a great fair in the county Sligo the next day, and that he would ride through the “Gap of Barnesmore” that night. All this was heard by the robber, who started immediately off to the Gap, and lay there in covert till the approach of his victim. The latter, meantime, had gone to his home for dinner, and to take a fresh horse for the long journey. During the meal the sky, which had been gathering and lowering all day, began to pour down torrents of rain, and to such a fearful degree that Connolly, anxious and determined as he was, was compelled to yield to the solicitations of his wife, and permit his horse to be put into the stable again. After a little, it cleared up somewhat, and the horse was again brought out; but again Mrs. Connolly's counsel obtained, and again the animal was stabled. A third time Connolly prepared to start, and a third time he rued. Finally, he gave up his notion of going that night at all, and remained at home. Though he knew it not at the time, he heard afterwards of the preparation made for him in “Barnesmore

Gap" by Donaldson; and the latter afterwards complained "that the stormiest, rainiest, most uncomfortable night I ever suffered was when I was lying one night in the Gap of Barnesmore watching for big Hughey Connolly, the great cow-jobber, who was to go that night to a fair in the county Sligo, with seven hundred pounds in his pocket."

So that we see the warning which Julius Cæsar disregarded from his wife is paralleled in humbler life.

Not all Donaldson's plans, however, resulted so harmlessly to their objects. A family named Reilly resided in his district. Young Reilly had been lately married and still lived with his young wife in his parents' dwelling. The two couples were living happily, and were comfortably supported from a little farm, assisted by the profits of their little whiskey shop and lodgings which they kept.

One evening about dusk three strangers entered, and demanded dinner, and beds for the night. The meal was prepared, the three wayfarers enjoyed it, and then drew themselves around the kitchen for a cosy chat. Bed-time approached. Old Reilly retired to rest in a little room off the kitchen, and the door of which was opposite to the fire where the strangers were chatting. Young Reilly and his wife withdrew also, their apartment being right behind the kitchen hearth. Old Mrs. Reilly sat up to rake the fire and lock the door when the lodgers should go to their beds, but they continued chatting and smoking for about an hour. One of them asked for the tongs to lift a coal for his pipe, but turning the head of them from him, he suddenly struck old Mrs. Reilly on the forehead with them, knocking her senseless on the floor. As she fell she screamed. The husband heard the scream, and burst up from his little bed-room; but as he entered the kitchen, he, too, received another blow from the same hand, and was stretched for dead. The son, hearing the scuffle, hastened from his bed, but on his first appearance at his room-door, one of the three men levelled a pistol at him and shot him through the head. The robbers—for they were Henry Donaldson and two of his men—then took some yarn that was hanging up in the kitchen, and bound the old couple and a little servant

girl who had lain, scared to death almost, in her little bed all the time. Young Mrs. Reilly, by some impulse which impelled her, even against her will, to the act, sprang from her bed, and leaped out through a window of the room, flying for safety and shelter to the coverts of the lonely, heather-clad moor! As she was crossing her room her foot struck against her husband's trousers; these she caught and jerked under the bed as she started. And fortunate was it that she did so, for in the trousers' pocket was the occasion of the robbers' attack. Old Mr. Reilly had that morning given his son forty pounds to buy a farm for himself, but some unforeseen business prevented the young man's purchasing the place that day. The robbers had heard of the money, and of the disappointment about the purchase. Concluding therefore that they could have a quiet robbery, they made the attempt, as mentioned. When they had tied the old couple and the servant girl, they searched the house, but failed to discover their prize, and the only spoil they brought away with them was some linen that the Reillys had woven themselves and had stored past. Henry Donaldson often said that he never regretted anything he ever did so much as that night's job; and the murder of young Reilly was one of the misdeeds that brought his men to the scaffold. Old Mrs. Reilly and her husband were only stunned and soon recovered from the blows, but the death of their son was a blow they ceased to remember only in the grave, while young Mrs. Reilly met an early death from the scare, and the cold on the moor.

The above is no imaginary scene; it actually happened; and the following incident is no less founded on fact, the truth of which, hundreds of inhabitants living around me as I write, can vouch for from plain remembrance.

A young man was strolling along one of the roads leading to Meneyfin some years previous to the opening events of this story. His attention was not fixed on anything in particular. His imagination was playing fast and free over the present and the future, while his memory rambled among many pleasing incidents of the past. Silent and calm he strolled along, and silently and calmly the night rolled onward; scarcely a star gemmed the

dark vault overhead. The young man became suddenly conscious of a disturbing body acting from no great distance on his nervous susceptibilities. It is often so. We frequently feel a warning thrill vibrating through us, generating a watchfulness and caution—this it did on our strolling youth. With a sort of half wariness, half carelessness, he found himself several times pausing to listen for any approaching sound. Calm himself as he could, he could not shake off the uneasy feeling of a proximate disturbance. When, therefore, he heard stealthy footsteps sounding, not far distant, he considered himself justified in springing over the hawthorne hedge that happened to border the road at this particular part. He lay down and listened. The footsteps grew more distinct. Nearer and nearer they came, and at length the watcher discerned four persons moving swiftly along; he recognised them—they were Henry Donaldson and three of his men. Impulsed, he could never tell why, to follow them, he crept silently yet rapidly along in shelter of the hedge. He was often nearly caught by their suddenly stopping and crouching low as if listening for some one's approach. All at once they threw themselves over the hedge on the other side of the road. The watcher wondered at this movement; but a whistle, which sounded not far off, being answered by one of the four robbers, he wisely, and as it will be seen, rightly concluded that an accomplice was around. He was made certain of this, by the approach of another man, who began at once to chat with Donaldson, telling him that "the house might be robbed by a parcel of children or old wives; not a single man-servant could I see about the premises."

"And how about getting in?" Donaldson asked.

"Oh, Miss Porter is charitable, and will not refuse to assist a poor forlorn creature who has lost a leg fighting for his country," responded the robber scout, with a loud heartless laugh.

"Silence, Jordan, and not bring the soldiers on us with that laugh. You'll go and act the soldier to-night, as you know the premises well, and we'll follow along and be there about two."

Our traveller behind the hedge crept away at this moment, believing he had heard enough; but not until he had gained a

considerable distance from the robbers did he venture into the upright position. Saying to himself, "It must be Miss Porter, of Castleporter, they are going to rob. Well, for the kindness she showed us when my father was dying, I'll save her from robbery this time at any rate, when Providence threw me in the way of hearing them fellows laying their plans;"—saying this, he started across the country at a rapid rate till he arrived at Castleporter. He lifted the latch of the kitchen door and entered. "Can I see Miss Porter?" he demanded in haste of a servant girl.

"Why, Ned McCool, as I live!" she exclaimed; "where in the world have you wandered from? What a stranger you are!"

"Not a stranger where I ought to be a visitor," replied Ned; for he it was; "but ask Miss Porter quickly, Sarah, if I can see her."

He did see her; and they concocted a plan to frustrate the robbers' designs. Ned wished to get going away home, for private reasons; but Miss Porter insisted so earnestly on his remaining that he consented; for either he or any other Irishman never refused his assistance to a lady in danger or distress. In about an hour after Ned's arrival, a lame soldier, in old faded scarlet jacket and black pants, hobbled into the kitchen, and begged some supper and a shake-down in the corner for the night, for that he had travelled far that day, and was able to walk no farther. On the servants asking Miss Porter for advice, orders were given to prepare a good supper for the old soldier. Indeed the good hostess came down stairs herself and saw to the cooking; and with her own hands brought a foaming jug of ale, that the old man might enjoy a hearty supper; for she said she could never refuse bread nor bed to the brave defenders of her country. Nor did the defender refuse the proffered kindness; but, on the contrary, he ate a hearty supper, and drank to the health of his charitable hostess the brimming pitcher of ale. He soon felt drowsy and begged for a little shake-down,—"anything at all—any corner in the kitchen," he would be satisfied with. A little straw was spread on the kitchen floor in a corner, some old bedclothes were also laid down, and the poor old soldier, with

great struggling and sighing, and with evident signs of weariness, hobbled to the pallet, and sank down at once into a deep sleep. Miss Porter at that moment left the kitchen, and the house clock struck eleven.

"We have a long time yet to wait," said the lady, as she regained the room above-stairs where Ned was awaiting her return; "but the old hypocrite down in the kitchen is sleeping well. He thinks he is decoying us by his feigning asleep, but I could easily see that the laudanum I put in the ale was already affecting him."

"Let him take it. But have you any firearms, Miss Porter, in the house, may I ask?" said Ned.

"I have a couple of good guns, and a brace of as good pistols as ever shot a pheasant, Mr. McCool" answered the lady; "I'll get them here—will I?"

"Yes; better do. And bring some ammunition also."

The firearms were brought up, carefully examined and loaded by Ned, who then asked: "Can you use the pistols, Miss Porter?"

"Yes; I think I can."

It was not the words that satisfied Ned that Miss Porter was a first-rate shot; but the quiet determined manner in which the words were said convinced him that she was.

The servants were all sent to bed but one old woman who sat up with the mistress and Ned; indeed she was more of a companion than a servant to Miss Porter. All the bedroom doors were locked, and the keys brought to the watch-room. All the other doors and windows of the house that were usually locked were closed; but no unusual precautions were observed. The drawing-room window, opening on the lawn in front, and the kitchen window, which opened on the back-yard, were left unfastened. The old soldier slept on in the kitchen, and the clock struck twelve.

"You ought to bring your most expensive valuables into this room, Miss Porter," suggested Ned.

"Then come and assist me," she responded.

The three watchers went quietly into several other apartments,

and returned, each heavily laden, to the room they had left. It should have been remarked that Miss Porter chose her own bedroom for watching in, as it would be the one least likely to create suspicion of a preparation for the robbers, in which to have a light burning.

"There are more than three thousand pounds' worth of money and other valuables in this room at this moment," remarked Miss Porter in a whisper to her companions after a few minutes' silence succeeding their return.

The clock struck one.

"They may come any time now," whispered Ned.

The watchers remained silent but attentive, and another half hour passed. Then a gentle tapping was heard, which sounded as if at the kitchen door. Then there was silence—rapping again—silence again—more rapping; and finally a long silence succeeded. This stillness lasted for about ten minutes, perhaps only five,—for a short time looks long under such circumstances,—and then a soft creaking on the stairs told that some one, the robbers surely, was ascending them. The three watchers then withdrew into a corner of the bedroom, in such a position as to be invisible themselves from the outer room, while commanding a good view of the bedroom door. They lessened their light, but did not extinguish it. The door of the outer apartment opened; and the opening of it rang a bell. This seemed, as it were, to rouse Miss Porter from her sleep. She gave a tramp on the floor as if leaping from the bed, while she demanded, in a half sleepy, half awake kind of utterance, who was there? There was no response. The old servant slid from her position in the corner beside her mistress and Ned, behind the curtains of the bed, which stood near them. The light from the bedroom was suddenly freshened up, and the old servant held up four fingers.

"Four of them," whispered Ned; and Miss Porter again spoke.

"I demand again who is there."

"We are four men come for your money. We know you keep

it in your bed-room; give it out to us, and we will go quietly away; refuse it, and it will be worse for you, for we know you are unprotected. Give us the money, or at least a good deal of it."

"I suppose you are Henry Donaldson and his men. Well listen, Donaldson; I *have* my money in my bed-room here, and you may take it if you can. But I have also charged pistols here too, and the first man of you who enters this room will never leave it alive. Now come and take my money if you dare."

"Don't try to humbug us, Miss Porter, for we don't stand that. We want the money and must have it."

"Then come and take it; but remember what I told you—the first man who shows himself in my view is dead."

There was a pause among the four robbers after this warning. They were debating as to the advisability of attempting to enter the room, notwithstanding Miss Porter's caution. They agreed, however, to test her assertion about the pistols, and one of them held his hat forward to the bed-room door; in fact, Donaldson himself did it. He put his hat on the barrel of a pistol and held it forward.

"Tis only a hat you are holding there," Miss Porter mockingly exclaimed; "put forward a hand, and I'll let you know if I'm armed. Perhaps you'll put belief when a leaden ball bores your hand."

One of the four stepped forward, held in his left hand, and the next instant a crack of a pistol was heard; the robber withdrew his hand, but it was minus the third finger, and the blood was pouring from the wound.

"Now, will you believe me?" tauntingly demanded Miss Porter.

The robbers seemed satisfied with her proof, for they did not again venture to approach the bedroom door; and, after a whispered consultation, they withdrew altogether, vowing as they went that they'd "make the old vixen sup sorrow with the spoon of grief for that night's work some other night."

As they went, a light in one of the servants' bedrooms was noticed, and an eye peered out through the keyhole. One of the robbers peeped in, and the servant muttered as he did so, "Petther Johnstone, the robber! oh, God save us!"

When Johnstone came out: "Beys, we're known," said he to his comrades; "Sally McAteer saw me through the keyhole, and I heard her saying my name. She is the only one that saw us."

"Then we can't risk our necks—go back and cut her throat," responded Galligan, who was the most cruel and heartless of the band, while Johnstone was one of the most noted and most determined, though also the most humane.

"I have no knife," objected Johnstone.

"Here is mine," answered Galligan.

"No, I won't," the other feelingly replied; "I never drew blood in such a way yet, and I'll not begin now."

"Come, men, we must see about Jordan," interposed Donaldson; "let us search the kitchen. The house was surely prepared and warned, and we must find the traitor who betrayed our plots."

"It wasn't Jordan, I'll swear," ejaculated each of the three, simultaneously, as if their chief's remarks applied to their missing comrade. Donaldson led the way to the kitchen, and there, sound asleep in the corner, lay the old soldier.

"Drugged, by H——!" shouted the men.

They caught him up in their arms, and carried him away with them, having disappeared from the premises as the clock struck the hour of three.

Ned McCool did not leave Castleporter till daybreak, and was fortunate enough to reach his home unseen. Like all truly and honestly courageous and good men, he never spouted about his part in that night's performance, nor did Miss Porter either; neither did she and her preserver ever meet again. She gradually grew lonelier and more lonely; and, though at the time of the attempted robbery she had six or seven servants constantly in the house, at the time of her death she had, as has been said, but one. The robbers never again attacked her; why, was unknown to her.

Such, then, was Henry Donaldson, the man introduced by Master Benjamin into Colonel Warburton's room, much to the colonel's amazement and rage, and which drew from him the ejaculation for the second time that he "would hold no converse with robbers," even though the robber's retort was so galling and startling on him.

"And what will you do, Colonel Warburton?" coolly demanded Donaldson.

"Deliver you up to execution and justice, as you have so long deserved," replied the other.

"You'll find it more to your benefit to hear what Master Benjamin has to say first," cautioned the robber.

"When listening to your conversation with your visitors, Warburton," interposed Master Benjamin, "I somehow involuntarily felt that the supposition regarding the real heir's being the person mentioned was correct. I happened to look out of the window at the moment, and noticed Mr. Donaldson passing along. Seeing him suggested the idea of his being able to assist us in getting rid of our difficulty for a little. Think of my suggestion, and I'm mistaken if you don't approve of it, even to the holding an intercourse with him for the sake of our mutual benefit."

"But how can he assist us, Edwards?"

"He probably knows of many hidden caves or ruined buildings where a prisoner could be held unknown to the outside world for years," was Edwards' reply.

"Pshaw! how could he, any more than you or I, know of such wonders?"

"He is an Irishman;—you are not. His habits and pursuits compel him to find out hiding-places!—yours and mine don't compel us to do so," explained Edwards.

"I know Ireland is a wonderful country," still objected the colonel; "but I am yet to learn that it is a complete burrow, though 'tis treacherous enough, Heaven knows."

"And yet, doubt and sneer as you will, Colonel Warburton," sharply replied Donaldson, "I tell you I am acquainted with coveys where not all your soldiers could find you, and I had you

in one of them. Ay, man, I could hold you for years, despite your whole command."

"Bosh! We are living in no land of robbers' dens and outlaws' caves, nor in the midst of miracles."

It was not the mere words that angered Donaldson. It was the withering, incredulous sarcasm that rang in the colonel's tones, that spoke from every feature of his countenance. Now, Donaldson's pursuits were not honest ones. He was no stickler for honesty. But his was a heart that loved some things. He loved adventure; he loved charity to the needy; he loved to torture the callous wealthy,—and he loved his country. He never silently suffered an insult to be cast on Ireland; but especially from an Englishman he brooked no impertinence. The colonel's taunt and manner annoyed him, and, approaching the haughty officer, he addressed him with words and tone that made that gentleman pale:—

"If you had only uttered the twentieth part of that doubting taunt on my word or my country, Colonel Warburton, on the side of Croghry Hill, you were now lying bound and fettered. You talk of Ireland being dens and caves;—yes, such she is exactly. A land of dens and caves, and ruined abbeys, and dilapidated castles our country is; and what she is she has been greatly made by you, Englishmen. Not a town, not a village, not a city, scarce a spot in our island but possesses some saddening reminiscence of your depopulating and destroying propensities. Ruined cottages, waste fields, beggared inhabitants, are the results of your, and such like, visiting Ireland. Nor could your centuries of planting, and pillage, and treachery have any other effect. And I tell you, Colonel Warburton, while an English brutal devil like you cumberers our land we shall never have peace nor prosperity. But thank God, your countrymen are not all like you."

"By the God of Heaven!" shouted the colonel, "you can never leave this room till you are dead or bound," and he rang the bell ere either of his two companions could interrupt him. It has been said that Henry Donaldson was not bulky but active; but the spring at the colonel and the blow he gave him were

those of no common man. Ere the servant opened the door the colonel was lying on the floor with Donaldson's foot on his breast; and Master Benjamin coolly informed the servant to "let no person up-stairs for an hour, on the pain of dismissal from his master's service."

Crestfallen and docile was Colonel Warburton when he rose from his ignominious position.

"I am aware, Colonel Warburton," began the robber, "that I have made you my enemy for life, and that any apparent friendship or conversation you may give me will be given only because you are afraid, or because it suits your purposes to do so. Now, let us get to business."

"Then here it is," replied Master Benjamin: "I am in debt to the colonel some thousands of pounds, which sum he has advanced to me at periodical times these few years past; and in return for which he holds mortgages on Rosedale property, both of us stipulating that as soon as I get possession of the estate I shall pay him either at the rate of five thousand a-year, till the debt is paid, or give him possession in my place for ten years, he guaranteeing not to destroy, nor decrease the value of, the property while he holds it. It has lately turned up, however, that some doubt has been thrown on the question as to whether I am the real heir to Rosedale. Indeed, the strongest arguments yet advanced tend to prove that I am not. Should it happen, therefore, that I'd become ousted from my present position and prospects, and have to descend to some beggar or farmer for my parents, the colonel loses all chance of ever obtaining his debt. Now I propose—and he, the colonel here, seconds my proposition—to seize the person who is to step into my shoes, hold him in secret bondage for some years—for as many as will enable the debt to be paid, and then release him. Can you do this for us? And if you can, name your price, and let us come to an arrangement."

"Let me repeat the proposition; for a clear understanding at the beginning prevents many difficulties on the way. I am to seize one man, convey him to a secret, suitable prison, unknown to any one but my own hand; and I am to support him there for

ten years, or fewer if needs be,—no longer,—at which time my connexion in the affair ends. Well, as you have so large a game at stake between you, my price must be high too; so I'll say five hundred pounds a-year, to be paid to me on the first day of each year; the first five hundred to be given as soon as I have my prisoner in his prison. Hear me out, gentlemen. A single pound less than the sum I have named I shall—not—take."

"We accept your offer," assented Master Benjamin.

"Conditioning," interrupted the colonel, "that we know the place of his imprisonment; and that we, separately or together, shall have free access to him any moment of the day or night that we choose to visit him."

"You shall see his prison within an hour of his being immured in it," Donaldson answered; "and shall have instant admission, either of you or both, to him at any moment. I must change one portion of my terms. My band are nearly out of cash, and I must have my first five hundred now. This done, and having heard the person's name I am to seize, I take my leave."

"Pay him, Warburton," said Master Benjamin.

The colonel drew out a pocketbook, counted out five hundred pounds, handed them to Donaldson, and added, as the robber fastened the money in a belt round his waist, "The person you are to seize, hold in captivity, and support for ten years, or fewer if found suitable, without any one's knowing of it, save your band and ourselves, at the yearly rate of five hundred pounds, to be paid on the first day of each year from this date, and the first five hundred of which you now hold,—that person is Hubert Santley."

"Hell and confusion! Hubert Santley! Had I known that, not for your five hundred a-year, nor for all the thousands ye have between you, would I have consented to interfere with him!" shouted the robber, as he actually leaped and trembled with passion, while he glared dangerously at the two men, who had, as he fancied, entrapped him; but he grew calmer, and continued: "as I have ignorantly and foolishly pledged myself to assist you, I'll not draw back; but remember, neither I nor one of my men will move hand or foot to retain our prisoner

should his residence be discovered; nor shall one of us, on the other hand, ever utter a syllable which would reveal his whereabouts."

"Agreed," said the colonel and Edwards in the one breath; "and now to know his intended prison?"

"Along the side of Croghry Hill, about a quarter of a mile above Heather Hall, there is a large white rock, commonly called the "Tinker's rock;" a few perches from this rock there is an entrance, vulgarly supposed to have been erected by our aboriginal ancestors as a protection, by the way of hiding, against the fierce Danes. This entrance has been closed up for years, and is now so closely packed by rubbish of stones, clay, and weeds that no one ever thinks of entering the cave. About seventy yards from this old entrance there is a large stone fence running along, and in the middle of it there is an immense block of a stone forming a part of this wall. I was sitting on this stone one day, or rather one evening, some twelve years ago, I think, filling my pipe to have a smoke. Suddenly my knife disappeared; and, searching for it, I saw that it had slid away down the sloping side of the big stone I was sitting on, for there I could see it glancing away down below. The next evening a couple of us examined the affair to get out my knife, when we were astonished to find that the stone covered a big hole, and this we found led into the cave by an opening we had never heard about, nor thought of before. We went down, and rambled through several apartments, as we had light enough owing to the opening we had made. We came up again by the ladder of ropes we had made to get down by; and ever since then our cave on Croghry Hill is our best and most favourite rendezvous; and it is there that I would imprison Hubert Santley; and I pledge you my word his prison won't be discovered till we like to release him."

"Capital," exclaimed Master Benjamin.

"Have you no fears of my taking a body of my men and seizing you and your band in the cave some night, now that I

know your hiding-place?" demanded the colonel.

"No, no," replied the robber.

"And why?"

"Because our plans are too well laid. Never more than the half of us are in the cave at any one time. Four men are always on the watch when I'm inside; and every man has sworn a solemn fearful oath that to the death all traitors are to be punished. In an hour not a man of my band but will know of this conversation, and that you two are in the secret of the cave:—betray that trust, and the night or day you do so, I swear will be your last."

The threat seemed to appal the Colonel, but had no visible effect on Master Ben. The three remained silent for a little, when Donaldson continued, half questioningly:—"I may go now? You may expect to hear from me some time to-morrow or next day;" then unrolling a strong thong of plaited leather which he drew from the mouth of his boot, and fastening one end of it by a hook, on to the window-sill, he let himself down from the apartment he had entered, on to the bye-road which skirted the wall surrounding the hind quarters of the barracks where the colonel's rooms were situated. It was along this bye-road he had been walking when called on by Master Benjamin.

"I swear if ever I again meet that scoundrel in such a good situation for capturing him, that he shant go free a second time," angrily exclaimed the colonel, as the robber departed; "if only for his impertinence about his country, I'll make him pay for it."

The words were scarcely uttered when a good sized pebble came in through the open window. Guided by a sure and strong hand, it struck the impolitic speaker on the breast, while at the same time Donaldson's voice warningly was heard:—"You have made an unwise threat, Ronald Warburton, and shall receive a humiliating lesson for it, when you won't be expecting it. You are warned, and Henry Donaldson is not the man to make an idle boast."

When the colonel and his companion hastened to the window to do something, they knew not what, the bold speaker was coolly and daringly gazing up to meet their glances.

"But for the work you have before you for us, you'd never leave that spot alive," threatened the colonel.

"Move but a hand to touch me, and the gun now pointed at you from behind a hedge not many perches away, will lodge its contents into you. Ha, that startles you! But for my pledged word, I'd never have have left your room, you cowardly whelp, till I'd have put you where the young ganger put the girl on the hill-side twenty-five years ago, and where her mother uttered the curse that brought your old uncle and his family to an untimely end the other day. Go now—threaten no more—and always remember that I know enough to hold you up to public ridicule, and make you an example wherever you are known."

Ere the astonished officer, or the equally astonished Master Benjamin, could watch the course he pursued, the daringspeaker had disappeared. The colonel, instead of ordering instant pursuit, as a wise rascal would have done, simply requested his companion to keep silent on the matter.

"Though they are harmless and untrue," he said, "there's no good in reporting the ravings of a mad robber like Donaldson."

"But the cave, colonel; what think you of that proposition? And tell me why you made the arrangement that you or I could visit our prisoner any time we wished?"

"Are you so obtuse, Edwards? You aren't usually so. When we once have Santley in our power can we not try to buy him over? Should he refuse that, as he certainly would, let us starve him into compliance with our desires."

"Not do, Warburton; you're hiding something. We can't starve him, for we haven't the supporting of him," objected Edwards.

"But don't you see, man, that we can try to work on his fears, and make him give us a paper renouncing all claim to his inheritance in lieu of his freedom? Having got that, can't we tell then that he sent you that on his deathbed, and so be rid of our trouble?"

"But what if Santley is the wrong man?" Master Benjamin said, in an annoyed, absent manner; "I do not like to interfere with him; and I would give a great deal to know this mystery

thoroughly to the bottom. Who could help us, Warburton?"

"Huxtley is the only man in this country, I believe, able to put us on the right scent; but as you know he, unfortunately, is in no mood to talk sensibly on any subject just for a little."

At this moment a messenger was announced from the mayor, who was at Castleporter, the messenger said, and who requested the colonel's attendance there to hear the late Miss Porter's will read. The colonel rose to follow the messenger. Master Benjamin rose also; and, as the other was leaving the room, he put his hand on his shoulder saying, feelingly, steadily, yet regretfully, as the colonel wonderingly gazed at him: "You often promised, Warburton, that you would tell me some day why you were so kind to me, and why you so willingly lent me so much money. Will you tell me your reason now?" Ben's good part was uppermost now.

"Was what I did for you, for your good or evil?" asked the colonel in reply, placing his hand on the other's shoulder, just as Edwards's hand was placed on his.

"For evil—for evil—for evil," slowly and emphatically responded Master Benjamin.

"And for evil I did it—therefore I am not disappointed. Tell me, who was your mother—Lady Edwards—before her marriage; I mean what was her maiden name?" asked Warburton.

"Ellen O'Ronan," wonderingly replied the other.

"And Ellen O'Ronan once insulted me, and I swore to have revenge on her; but she died before my opportunity came. Now I took my revenge on you. I have woven my meshes round you, and can punish Ellen O'Ronan's son, even she has escaped me; and thus can I gloat my revenge. Are you answered now, why I was friendly to you, as the spider is to the fly? Fool! dolt! idiot! toel!"

Had the speaker been in a calmer mood, he'd have hesitated ere uttering these scathing sentences; and had he seen the contortions of the young man whose passions he thus roused, he would have involuntarily determined to guard against mischief; but he saw them not, nor heard he the oath of vengeance then

vowed against him. He went his way, glorying in his badness, rejoicing at his revenge, hoping for more success; but never, alas never! thinking that retribution must come some day, or that for his evil acts an equitable award of punishment was lowering for him in the future. No, no; he had no thought of the eternal future; thoughts of revenge and of Miss Porter's will occupied his thoughts till he reached Castleporter, his second visit there that day.

CHAPTER XV.

When you and I, dear readers, last parted from his worship, the Mayor of Moneyfin, he had just announced in Colonel Warburton's apartments and in presence of his four brother-magistrates that he had to leave for Castleporter to read Miss Sophia Porter's will. Let us take him up again in the family parlour of Castleporter house, in company with Rector Snodgrass, Sir Alexander Edwards, Colonel Warburton, Hubert Santley, and Miss Porter's old favourite servant. "Yeur worship" this old servant had said to the mayor as soon as he arrived, "you are to have certain persons present before I can give you my mistress's will," and she named the gentlemen mentioned above, adding one other name—Ned McCool. And on Ned they were now waiting; and when he arrived, which he did soon, the old servant handed the will to the mayor, who opened it from its neat foldings, round which was tied a piece of red tape, and sealed. On the outside was written in a plain female hand:—"The Will and Confession of Sophia Porter, of Castleporter House, Magheraporter, Spinster." And for the second time that day his worship proceeded to read the words of those then in eternity.

IN THE NAME OF GOD. AMEN.

I, Sophia Porter, Spinster, of Castleporter House, Magheraporter, of sound mind and in good health, make this, my last will and testament. And lest any one should hereafter wonder or enquire why I am doing so at this early period of my life, I now give two reasons for my thus acting: In the first place it is always advisable to have "our house in order;" for we never know when the last dread summons may arrive, and preparing for that day does in no manner hurry its approach; and, in the second place, as I am going to get married soon, I wish to have this offering prepared to place in the hands of my dear betrothed,

as soon as he receives the sweet name of husband. For be it known to all who may care to hear it, that I am to be wedded this day month, and this, my will, will be my wedding present to my husband. My husband! Oh, I could not live and not gain him. It is now about two years-and-a-half since I first met my betrothed; and it was real affection with me at first sight; and he has told me often it was the same with him. Loving him so deeply, so truly, so fervently as I do; and knowing how good, and attentive, and kind he is, and will continue to be, I am this night resolved to assign to him all the land, money, houses, or whatever other property else I own, to be his and his alone, and his heirs, for ever; and he is to enter into the possession of said assignment on the day of our marriage; the only limitation being a yearly allowance to my old servant, Catherine Blake, of fifty pounds yearly, and a free residence while she lives. And I make this distribution, or assignment, or whatever the proper legal term is, solely and entirely by my own wish and will, without any advice, compulsion, or persuasion from any one, either by word of mouth or by the pen, but simply and truly through the love I bear him who is to be my dear husband. Dear, good Ronald, how I do love you!

When the mayor read the last sentence, Colonel Warburton gave a very perceptible start, which, fortunately for him, passed unnoticed by all in the room save the old servant, Catherine, or, more familiarly, Caty Blake. He looked round to see if he were observed, and was put at his ease to find that all were too absorbed with the paper. "Pshaw," was his mental comment; "there's no one in the room knows I'm Ronald, and even they all knew that that was my Christian name, they can't know that Miss Porter and I were ever acquainted. And then, how many Ronalds may be in the world!"

Ah, Colonel, 'tis ever thus the devil tempts his followers; ever thus he lulls them into treacherous, fancied security, a truth to which they remain long blinded, but which they suddenly awake to find a punishment at some unprepared, unexpected moment. Ah, yes, Colonel, his arguments are always fallacious,

always lying, for is he not "the father of lies?"—and so your reasonings are now; there are those in your company at this moment who know your early history well, and are even now enjoying, in prospective, your well-merited punishment and disgrace. But to resume.

"Immediately at the foot of what I have just read, gentlemen," continued the mayor, not reading from the manuscript, but speaking of himself; "is the date 'June 29th;' while here, in this separate portion, the writing commences again at 'August 17th,' thus leaving near two months between the periods at which the different pieces of the will were written. This second piece, you can all see, is much fresher than the former one," and the speaker held the paper before them so that each could see there was the difference of appearance he mentioned, though without permitting it to leave his hand. This done, he continued to read from the manuscript.

August 17th. Lonely, weary, wretched, and heart-broken, I sit down to continue or rather to correct my "Last Will and Confession." My betrothal ring lies on the desk before me as I write, but my betrothed is fled far away! Fled, and left me arrayed in my bridal garments! Fled, and without giving me a word of hope or affection to sustain me in his absence, or cheer me till his return! Fled, fled, fled, and I am alone. Only three words did he condescend to leave me. "*I must leave.*" Why must he leave! Could I not have freed him from any trouble or debt! "*I must leave.*" Alas, alas, that I should reason so; but my better judgment tells me I shall never be his wife, never meet him in friendship again, never, never, more clasp his hand in tender, loving, mutual grasp! Oh, Ronald, Ronald, why have you deserted me thus? Why have you been false or treacherous to one who loved you so well as I did? Yes, as I do still, as I shall ever do, for my heart is yours, yours ever, yours till death, never another's.

"Here again, the direct thread of the manuscript is broken," interposed the mayor; "but, pinned on to the foot of the leaf I have just read, is a little strip. Here it is:"

I add, on this 17th day of August, that I revoke anything left to my betrothed, as mentioned in my paper dated June 29th. His perfidy deserves punishment, but my hand shall never inflict it; neither shall I ever permit him to enjoy aught belonging to me, Sophia Porter.

"Here now is a third part," again spoke the mayor, "with which I shall continue." And the manuscript went on as follows:—

It is now some years since I wrote the three foregoing pieces, and I have no reason to alter what I last put down. I still adhere to my resolution of never permitting him who was once my affianced to enjoy one farthing's worth of my property. This is my fixed, determined purpose, and nothing can now alter it. It is perhaps right that I should explain the cause of this, my change. The cause is this. It is only a few days ago since I received a letter from my false-hearted lover—should I write that word?—and it was only then I understood the utter depth of his evil and hollow nature. Here is a copy of what, in his cold-blooded, calm mood, he insulted me with; and judge, ye who hear it, am I not justified in withdrawing my assignment from such a——a villain, I was going to write, but I shall not descend even to such a level with him as to use a harsh term—such a creature:—

"Miss Sophia Porter,

"Madam,

"Let me express my hope that I am even now not too late in saying, that I regret our acquaintance got to such a length,—a length much beyond my wishes, even when I seemed most favourable to your intentions. I at first visited Castleporter only for my pleasure or amusement; your kindness and attentions made the place pleasant and agreeable, and caused me to continue visiting, though never having any thoughts of marriage. You are therefore to consider our acquaintance ended, and I conclude by wishing you a partner of your choice, with whom may your days pass long and happily.

"RONALD."

No date, no residence, no satisfaction; all cold and bitter and formal! Just and merciful Heaven, I beseech you not to visit him with punishment for my broken heart. How his words burned into my very soul!—"never having any thoughts of marriage." No thought, and he placing the betrothal ring on my finger; no thought, and he arranging where to spend the honeymoon; no thought, and he choosing my wedding dress to suit *his* taste; no thought, and he having spoken to the rector to marry us, he told me; no thought, and I, by his directions, having my bridesmaids invited; no thought, and he, with my letter and by my suggestions, having ordered the wedding breakfast to Castleporter; no thought of marriage, and he determined to resign his situation and live always with me in Castleporter! Just Judge, how could human nature pen such falsehoods! Oh, Ronald, Ronald, Ronald, Ronald, Ronald, how cruelly you deceived me, how cruelly forsook me, how cruelly led me on, how cruelly, coldly, causelessly, you broke my trusting, my too, too trusting heart; how easily, unfeelingly, unwisely, you slighted my hand! It is all as a dream, a nightmare, to me now; the honeyed words he poured into my willing ear; the fervid vows he breathed without any asking of mine; the warm grasp with which he so warmly clasped my hand; the welling look which spoke volumes of what I then thought earnest truth and love—all, all, is but a deadening dream, faded away, and never, never to return! It is, then, years, years, years, since he left me; he is gone, and farewell to him. It is not years though, not so many, since a young man of the neighbourhood of Moneyfin came to me one night at the risk of his life, and saved my house from robbery, and myself, perhaps, from violence or death. This young man, without hope of reward, but solely and only through his own charitable and feeling nature, having heard a plot made up to rob my house, hurried to me, and by the timely warning and efficient assistance he gave me, enabled me to thwart the intentions of the robbers, though I had to draw blood in preserving myself and my property from the attack they actually made. Moreover, I never made the robbers' attack public, nor did I ever publish the means by which I was saved; I made close en-

quiries, and was happy to find that my preserver kept silent on the matter also. This silence on his part assured me that he was really and sincerely honest, courageous, and above all, modest, and that he would be deserving of friendship, which he would truly prize, and of wealth, which he would use wisely. Therefore, as I am alone, and am the last of my race, there being no relation of mine to my knowledge now living; and as I dislike leaving my property, our family property, for any object that there might be annoyance or disputing about in a public way; I therefore, Sophia Porter, of Castleporter House, Magheraporter, hereby leave and bequeath, being in sound mind and of sound body as I write, all I am possessed of, all my property, whether in money, land, houses, furniture, jewels, or any other item belonging to me, save an annuity of one hundred pounds a year, a free residence, and my old clothes that she may fancy, to my faithful servant, Catherine Blake; but except this to her, said Catherine Blake, I leave all the rest to the young man, who so disinterestedly, courageously, modestly, and so timely saved me from being robbed. And that young man who so acted, is Edward McCool, more commonly, I understand, known as Ned McCool, foster-brother, I am told, to Mr. Hubert Santley. To Ned McCool, then, I leave and bequeath all Castleporter and my other property, save the annuity and other limitations I mentioned for my servant, Catherine Blake. And this, I, Sophia Porter, Spinster, do of my own free will; and the only binding limitation I attach on said Ned McCool, is, that he never, by any force or persuasion, suffer my old lover, that I have named Ronald, to obtain a single, even the least, tittle of what I here bequeath; and that my legatee, said Ned McCool, may have no trouble in finding out who this Ronald is, I here avow and pledge that his real full name is Ronald Warburton, at the time of our acquaintance gauger in Clonleek, afterwards officer in the regular army of His British Majesty in India, and nephew of Sir Ronald Warburton of Warburton Hall, Derbyshire, England.

SOPHIA PORTER, Spinster, Castleporter, Magheraporter.

"Gentlemen, this ends this manuscript," said the mayor,

when he had read thus far, and he rose and grasped Ned's hand as he spoke, while Hubert did the same. Sir Alexander muttered an oath to Miss Porter for an old fool, and old Caty Blake, ejaculated a hearty "God bless her," while the rector also shook hands warmly with Ned.

As for the colonel, he could not decide what to do. At one moment he felt inclined to glide from the apartment as suddenly and noiselessly as he could, but the next instant brought a revulsion of feeling buoying him up with the notion that Miss Porter's false lover and himself could not be proved to be the same person. And even to the moment of the mayor's finishing the will he determined to brave it out, and proclaim, if questioned, that the Ronald Warburton mentioned by the deceased was a cousin of his. And well for him, he mentally argued, that he was so apt in framing such a subterfuge; for the mayor, as he turned from Ned after his congratulations, addressed him.

"Colonel, it were wrong to suppose that you are the person so frequently referred to by our deceased friend?"

"You are right," unblushingly replied the officer; "it was probably my cousin who so falsely and heartlessly acted towards Miss Porter."

"And you are sure, Colonel, that it couldn't be you my poor mistress mentioned."

It was the old servant, Caty Blake, who put the question.

"I believe I have already said so to the mayor, my old woman," haughtily responded the colonel.

"I nearly forgot, your worship," Caty Blake said, suddenly addressing the mayor, and, putting her hand into that receptacle where, with females, all dear or precious articles are hidden, the bosom, she drew out a little folded piece of paper, and handed it to the mayor; "here is another little bit of paper, that my mistress

wrote only two or three months ago, and that I found lying beside that large lump," pointing to the manuscripts already read. The mayor opened the new piece and read :

" I add this piece, now nearly thirty years since I wrote the first part ; and I do so for the purpose of warning my legatee, Ned McCool, and to tell all those present when this will and confession of mine will be being read, that the Ronald who was once my betrothed, who was a ganger in Clonleek, who was an officer in His British Majesty's regular army in India, who is nephew of Sir Ronald Warburton, of Warburton Hall, Derbyshire, that that same Ronald is now Colonel Warburton, commanding officer of the soldiers stationed in Moneyfin. This identity I swear to.

" SOPHIA PORTER."

There was no Colonel Warburton in Castleporter parlour when the mayor finished the reading of this scrap of Miss Porter's confession. He had leaped through an open window and galloped away when he saw the conclusion and identification approaching.

" So that is the villain ! " angrily ejaculated the mayor. " Thank Heaven that we have unmasked him at last. Henceforward his society is to be shunned by all honest men ; and by you in particular, McCool. Let me congratulate you from my heart upon your good luck, and to wish you many happy years to enjoy Castleporter, and do good to those around you."

" The old fool, what a cursed notion she took of bestowing such a magnificent property on an ignorant peasant like that fellow," indignantly muttered Sir Alexander.

" From what I know and have heard of your character, McCool," said his reverence to our hero ; " and from all I have seen of you, I am happy to add my congratulations also."

Hubert Santley's heart was too full for utterance, but the glance and grasp he gave his foster-brother, were fervent as man could give or man might wish.

"I would wish to understand from you, however," and the rector, addressed Oaty Blake; "why it was that so many of us were summoned to hear your mistress's will, that is Miss Porter's will, read."

"I'll tell your reverence then," replied the woman; "*you* were asked by me, as my mistress advised me before her death to do, because you might remember of young gauger Warburton, of Clonleak, going long ago, thirty years ago, to ask you to marry him, or to have some chat with you about the license or something."

"Ever since Colonel Warburton came to the barracks," rejoined the rector, "I have been often trying to recall where I met him before, or some one resembling him very closely, but was always at fault. Now, however, I have an indistinct recollection of the young gauger's coming to me, conversing about his marriage, and promising to call again next day; but I remember perfectly—yes, quite distinctly, now—of wondering why he did not return. Oh, yes, 'tis the same, the features are vividly before me now."

"You, Mr. Mayor, were to be asked to be here to read the will, so that when Colonel Warburton would be shown in his true colours," continued Oaty Blake, "your high authority would keep him down in his right place. You, Mr. Santley, I asked to come, as I knew you were the foster-brother of Ned here, and would be glad to know of his good fortune. And you, Sir Alexander Edwards, were asked, that you might see the sort of a man or devil your son was keeping company with, and interfere to save him. For Miss Porter wished that not only Ned here would be always warned from the colonel, but that all who might be hurt or harmed by his rascality should be warned as well as Ned."

"Save the devil," muttered Sir Alexander, hastily taking leave, and speeding homeward.

"I shall take care," added the mayor, "that he keeps a proper distance from good society, for I shall brand him as a villain and liar and traitor everywhere I can. 'Tis a tribute I owe society," added his worship, apologetically; as if his ire mastered his prudence and customary calmness for once.

All this time Ned hadn't been able to utter a syllable. He was astounded at the revelations of Miss Porter and the disposition of her property. His thoughts would rest no where. Wandering, wandering; wondering, wondering, they went, his thoughts did; doubting, fearing, wondering, hesitating; this instant resolving to refuse the gift, the next determining to accept, but still undecided, wavering, unsettled. He could not believe his good fortune; he had no reason, no shadow of reason, to doubt it. The hesitancy and indecision on his countenance were sufficiently plain for one who knew him, as Hubert Santley did, to read his thoughts.

"Now Ned," said Hubert; "I can see you are in doubt whether to accept Miss Porter's munificent gift or not. Think of it. If you resolve to refuse, see the amount of trouble, and loss to the country, you cause; if you accept, as I am determined you shall, what amount of good can you not do? How many a hungry one you can feed! Yes, yes, Ned, God has thrown this into your hands, and to refuse it, would be to refuse His gift, sent to you to do good for yourself, good for your friends, good for the poor and hungry and sorrow-stricken, and, Ned, good for your country."

"You have decided me, Hubert. I accept. And may no tongue ever say, nor heart feel, that I am either uncharitable, harsh, or selfish. I'll try and use the gift for no bad purposes; and may I so receive mercy hereafter, as I pledge myself now to act truly and liberally to my fellow-creatures."

"Manfully and well spoken," exclaimed Rector Snodgrass; "I honor the sentiments, and shall be happy to meet, in an equal friendship, at my table or elsewhere, the man who utters them."

Manfully and well spoken, too, Rector Snodgrass. Noble avowal; for neither wealth nor position makes the gentleman. 'Tis Nature alone can do that. And were there more like you, Rector, in the world, society would not be plagued on this August day of this year of eighteen hundred and seventy-one, by so many dissensions and differences! Were those in high positions to be more social, more friendly, more open to genial intercourse with those who, though in a lower scale, yet deserve such attention, the world were happier indeed! But alas for it! The poor peasant is looked upon, too often, as the menial, the slave, the dirt, of the ignorantly haughty but proud owner of a few thousands a year! Poor Ned McCool, thy bones are now mouldering in Moneyfin graveyard; but in thee and thy peasant countrymen there are more really true hearts than there would be among worlds of the upper ten thousand. But so it is to be, probably; though one cannot help wishing as Hubert did to the rector: "I would, Mr. Snodgrass, that there were more like you, who would not refuse the hand of friendship to merit, whether among the peer or the pauper; then, indeed, our poor old Ireland were changed, truly and really, for the better."

"Though a Scotchman, and, therefore, a foreigner, I have ever loved your country and her peasantry, Mr. Santley; and believe me, though you will hardly admit it, the cause of much of your unhappiness is to be traced, equally as much, if not more, to native traitors or miscreants, than to strangers like myself. As long as one among you can be gulled by renegades, or betrayed by alien and treacherous interference, so long will your island be the sport of rebellion, anarchy, or unhappiness."

"Or rather, Mr. Snodgrass," partly interrupted Hubert, "as long as foreign gold is held temptingly before us to lead us to temptation; as long as talented hypocrites, political scoundrels, needy adventurers, and sycophantic intriguers find footholds among us, so long will we be the dupes of villainous designs and destructive plots."

"And that will be, Mr. Santley," added his reverence, "as

long as the benefits of education are not disseminated among you. Let you then, McCoel, use your best endeavours to promote education among your peasantry. Teach them to avoid illegal societies that lead them to the gallows or the prison or the penal colony, for such associations are oftener organized for the benefit or through the folly of a few rather than for the good or by the wish of the majority, and more generally give opportunities for those who wish to do so to trample on and betray you still more. And let your efforts be seconded by such as my friends the mayor and Mr. Santley; while for us clergymen, since our mission is to announce peace and love to all, let us use our pulpits not to sever or to widen brotherly affection, but to cement or create those bonds of union and fraternity which make a people happy, contented, and prosperous; and such I wish Ireland to be."

"And with heart and soul, so do all here," responded the mayor; "but tell me yet one other matter;" and he addressed the old servant; "why did you so wish the will to be read this evening instead of waiting till after the burial to-morrow?"

"I was just waiting to tell you all," answered Caty; "it was a notion of my own. I knew what was in the will, and I didn't like to see my mistress going to her last home, without some one to mourn for her, and see that the arrangements for the funeral would be respectably done, as becomes one of the Porters; and now I know that Ned here 'll do that, for he has a good heart, and a good right now besides.

"And I'll do it, Caty; and while I live, you will live here where you have lived so long, and be to me as good an adviser and companion as you have been to Miss Porter," and Ned shook hands with the old woman, while her eyes filled with tears of thankfulness. The mayor and his reverence departed, while Hubert and Ned remained to make some requisite arrangements for the interment next day.

CHAPTER XVI.

On the fair evening of Moneyfin, some two hours after Colonel Warburton's abrupt exit from Castleporter, two different parties of men could be noticed in two different quarters of the town. One of these bodies was drinking in one of the public-houses in a back part of the town, and though endeavouring to seem unconnected by any closer tie than mere acquaintance, an attentive observer would notice that the frequent exchanges of intelligent glances denoted an intimate degree of brotherhood. And stay! Do you notice nothing peculiar about that tall dark visaged man as he lifts his glass to his mouth? See his hand! Does it not want the third finger of his left hand? It does, and then surely that is the same man whose finger was shattered by Miss Porter when the robbers attacked her mansion? It is he, and these five men are part of Henry Donaldson's band. They sit on, drinking till long after dark, on till ten or eleven o'clock, and then they gradually move away, one by one, each man leaving his comrades as if to return again in a few minutes.

At the same time when the five robbers were drinking so freely in McMonagle's public-house, a party of three persons were lounging in one of the most out-of-the-way stables of Moneyfin barracks. The night was too dark for their countenances to be recognised, and their persons were enveloped in large overalls. One of them produced, after a good deal of fuss and preparation had been spent in ornamenting their faces in some way, a dark lantern, and throwing the light on each in turn, he exclaimed, as he examined each, "The devil himself couldn't know you now;" he then turned the light on himself, and was told that he wouldn't know himself. A looker-on could see that this transformation was caused by the masks which the three men had donned, thereby making themselves unrecognisable indeed,

Time sped on. The three maskers were soon joined by a fourth, masked also. His entrance caused a general stir, more especially when he uttered the single word, "Ready?"

"All right," was the reply, given in the same hushed tone, and the four men then moved away, taking the road leading towards Magheraporter.

Meantime, the people were gathering for the second night's wake at Castleporter. Ned McCool, Hubert Santley, Owen Slevin, Peter Connolly, Brian Malone, and the principal talkers of the night before, not excluding the pedantic Mr. Bresland, were all gathered, some in the kitchen, and some in the room in which the will was read. The night wore on, the lights casting a dim, uncertain, glimmering light on the lawn, along which now and then, twos or threes of the wakepeople took a stroll to refresh or amuse themselves. See! Remark those three figures moving along under the shadow of the trees; does there not seem something familiar about that one, the tallest of the three? To be sure, it is the negro! What, in the names of St. Peter and St. Paul can have brought him and his companions,—see, there's the gleam of light on them now, and shows them to be masked just as the two men were who assisted in punishing Colonel Warburton and his two worthy companions that early morning—what can have brought them there now? Who knows what the negro may have scented? They say those negroes are sharp at discoveries. But see, here are three more strollers coming forward; and they have overtaken the negro and his companions, and the six approach the house together.

The greater part of Castleporter House was in darkness; all the rear and sides were, except the kitchen and one room. The six strollers slid silently round to the hind part, and opening a window in what was in times gone past the butler's room, the six entered into the building through the window, one after another.

"What the devil are we brought here for?" exclaimed one of the men, in a voice that sounded very like Brian Malone's, but of course it couldn't be his.

"How impatient you are!" replied the same voice that had addressed Sir James Darcus in his own parlour at Heather Hall, the negro's:—"I was down in the fair there about an hour ago, and happened to hear a chat between the mayor and the junior lieutenant in the barracks. This lieutenant is a great friend to the colonel, and was making a kind of careless enquiries from the mayor about Miss Porter's will, and who she left her property all to. And the mayor told him to Ned McCool, and the lieutenant, laughing, said that the will would be taken care of well, and he supposed the mayor brought it with him for safety. The mayor told him he did not, that he gave it to Ned McCool, the proper owner, and that he even went with McCool till he saw him locking it carefully past in a good strong box in the library. I saw a bright twinkle in the lieutenant's eye when the mayor mentioned where the will was hid, and I watched him on till he went into the barrack, and till I saw him and Colonel Warburton chatting as thick looking as a pair of sweethearts. Then, boys, I thought it was time to come on here and get some preparation made, for my life for a guinea if that devil of a colonel doesn't make an attempt to get that will, for I hear that a part of it would give him the whole property."

All this was told in a whisper by the negro to his companions, after which he continued:—"I could have told Ned McCool, and he could have got hands enough to help him, but then maybe nobody would come, and we'd only be laughed at; so we'll stay about here and watch for anything that may happen. If any body does come to get to the library, let them go on up without us touching them or letting them know we're here, and then we'll follow them and lock them in if we can, and if it comes to kneccks, why we'll give them a tussle at that too. If nobody comes, we'll have our night's watching for nothing, but that won't do us much harm."

So it was agreed. The clock struck eleven. Then twelve. And about three quarters of an hour after, a slight noise was heard outside. Four men entered the room through the window as the other six had done. Without speaking, they all fumbled

a little at their feet, and then three of them were felt to pass out and up the stairs, while the fourth returned to the outside through the window, carrying a pretty good-sized bundle with him.

"That man must be seized without giving him time to squeal," whispered darkey to his companions in the same almost inaudible voice, and gliding out through the window as he spoke. The man, evidently placed there as a sentinel, turned as he heard footsteps approaching, and in a low voice asked, "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," answered the negro, striking him, and knocking him down. Then he tied and gagged him, dragged him a few yards away, and threw him under a tree. He groped about and found the bundle; it was the boots of the three men in the house; they were determined to go to work silently. He hid the bundle, and then returned to his companions, all of whom accompanied him up stairs after the three intruders; up the stairs and along corridors, silently as cats, until they approached the library, where they could readily distinguish an indistinct glimmering. The door stood ajar, with the key in the lock on the side of the door next the corridor; to seize the key, draw the door close, and lock it, was the work of a moment, and was the first warning the men in the library received that they were watched.

"Trapped, by Heaven!" exclaimed a voice from the inside.

"That sounds like Colonel Warburton's voice," muttered the negro; "we'll chance it at any rate. Cuhnell Wahbution," and the speaker raised his voice as he addressed those in the library, "fauh de second time dis day you ah trapped by de black debbil, ha! ha! ha!" and the guttural tones of the darkey rang out in his hearty cachinnation.

There was no reply to this feeler for a little, but a subdued whispering from the inside reached those without. Then a different voice exclaimed: "What do you mean by naming Colonel

Warburton's name here? There's no such person here. Open the door, or we'll set fire to the house."

"Do, and get cenflagrated to de ashes yourselbs. Golly, dolly, dat will be one grand bleeze! To hear de frizzlin and 'de roasting will be berry, berry purty! Ha! ha! ha!"

A creaking noise in the inside followed. The negro, on hearing it, prompted his companions: "They are going to try the window and escape. Go three of you out, and catch, tie, and gag them as they go down, for they may have ropes, or may make ones by tying their clothes together. When you succeed or fail, come one of you for me. *But you mustn't fail*," and the speaker's voice deepened as he warned them.

The three glided out unheard.

The last speaker again spoke from the inside: "Are you going to open that door? I'll give you three minutes. If you don't open in that time, I'll set fire to the books and papers, and get burned, myself and the rest of us, sooner than get taken."

"You will, will you?" tauntingly responded the negro; "golly, Jehobah, dat will be a great combustion."

"I'm going to ignite the tinder," soon again from the library.

"Eh? You don't mean to insinuate dat you are so tinder-hearted as dat comes to!" was the negro's punning reply.

Again there was silence; and again the creaking noise began.

"The three minutes are almost up; open the door before I set to the blaze," again spoke the inside speaker.

The negro spoke not, but easily, oh, so easily and smoothly, he turned the key in the lock. The door opened noiselessly, and he soon had the satisfaction of viewing the library. A lantern stood on the floor, emitting a faint, very faint light around; but dim as it was it enabled the negro and his companion to see that the apartment was much tossed, and to discern the figures of two

men on the sill of the open window. One of these was in the act of descending, and the other was assisting. The negro waited until the foremost of the two had time to reach the ground, when he sprang forward, caught the remaining intruder by the throat, drew him into the room, and pinned him to the ground before the unfortunate fellow had time to shout for warning or for mercy. Then bound and gagged, the man found himself lifted by his captors, carried down stairs, and out into the lawn; and was astonished to find himself placed on the ground amidst a crowd of eight or ten persons, some standing, some lying bound and gagged like himself, but all silent.

Some half hour after this, an old woman entered the kitchen at Castleporter, and enquired for Master Hubert Santley. Hubert, attentive always to old or young, rose and accompanied the messenger. He did not return for a little. Half an hour passed; then an hour, and still Hubert was not forthcoming at the wake.

"What can have happened Hubert, Brian?" asked Ned of our big blacksmith; "I wonder he is staying away so long."

"Maybe he has got some sudden word to go home, or go and see his sweetheart," answered Brian; "if he doesn't come about daybreak, let him go and make some search for him."

"I'd like to go now, Brian," rejoined Ned; "I feel queer, and fear that something has come on him."

"Troth, that's all a sham, Ned; you're no saint nor prophet, to be thinking that Providence wud give you a feelin' o' what woz comin'!"

"I know that, Brian; but yet I can't shake off my notion that Hubert is in danger. We are so intimate, you know, Brian, that it's no wonder harm to him or me should make the other feel alarmed. I'll go and see about him, Brian; stay you here, and keep your eye about you;" and off Ned started to satisfy his fears about his foster-brother.

It is a strange, inexplicable feeling that comes over some people when any difficulty, danger, or disagreeableness is lowering, even though unseen, in the distance. Whether it be imagination, or some sympathetic principle that so operates, is probably uncertain; but that there are persons who have felt warning thrills vibrate through them, followed by unexpected calamities, is an indisputable fact, and one within the writer's own experience. To fancy that Providence would endow such individuals with a sort of prophetic foreknowledge, is an unwarranted hypothesis; to argue that the devil could do it, is perhaps not less fallacious; then whence arises that dismal foreboding or pleasant anticipation of approaching sorrow or approaching gratification?

Had Ned McCool been asked the reason of his uneasiness regarding his foster-brother, he could have assigned none save a mental inquietude that allowed him no peace till he would satisfy himself of the mystery. He first sped towards Hubert's residence, but found there, on rapping them up, that he had not returned from the fair; then he started for the wake at widow Mason's, but was disappointed there too, and, only allowing a few minutes' conversation by way of explanation with Mary Carlin, Ned started at a rapid pace for his own house. Here he found that a few friends were enjoying themselves in honour and in celebration of his good fortune, both at the fight and by the legacy, for the news from Castleporter spread fast and far. Ned was still more vexed and astonished to learn that Hubert had not been there that night at any time; so, only waiting to drink his friends' health and a prosperity to them similar to his own, he next started for Heather Hall. Arrived there, not the assurance from the servant who came at his knock that all were in bed and no stranger was in the house, would satisfy him till he would see Miss Darcus herself.

"Tell her 'tis a message about Hubert Santley," said Ned to the servant, who was hesitating about disturbing "the young mistress."

In a few minutes "the young mistress" came down stairs, dressed, and held out her hand to our hero.

"I wish you many long years of health and happiness, Ned," she said, in her sweet, agreeable way, her eyes sparkling with the real pleasure she felt; "to enjoy your new and magnificent possession."

"And you the same for me to neighbour you. But tell me truly have you seen or heard from Hubert within this last couple of hours?"

"I have not seen him, Ned, since papa and he rode away about midday yesterday, or to-day, Ned, which is it? Have you lost him or why else do you ask?"

"May I know, if Sir James, your papa, is long at home yesterday evening, or last night—for we are in a new day; or if he mentioned any strange item of news after his return from the fair, or if Sir Alexander Edwards was here last night with him?"

"What a host of questions, Ned? Papa was home before nightfall yesterday evening, and I noticed that he was particularly confused and crotchety all night, but he told me no new piece of news, only of your fight and your success,—I was so glad to know you were the victor,—it was from my maid I heard of the legacy. Sir Alexander was here last night; he and papa had a long conversation, closeted together in the library. But what is the strange item of news you mean, Ned? I have answered your questions all, and you may now answer mine."

Ned hesitated before replying. He did not know what effect his news would have on her feelings, and he would not, unheedingly, risk hurting them. He had now become morally certain that Hubert was in danger; and to tell her that was a hard task. Yet he felt she would rather know the worst, than that her imagination should run wildly over fancied dangers. He looked her full and penetratingly, but at the same time feelingly, in the face, and asked her would she really like to know all?

Certainly she would.

So then he told her of the adventures and discoveries of the

preceding day and night, not omitting the punishment inflicted on Colonel Warburton and his companions as far as the negro told him, he said, and thus concluded:—"An old woman called at Castleporter to see Hubert; he went out with her but did not return. I grew so uneasy that I had to start off to hunt him up, but have been unsuccessful so far."

"And can you form no idea where he has gone to?" Miss Darcus queried after a thinking fit of near a minute; "do you think would anyone waylay him or murder him?"

"No, no," hastily answered Ned; "you may rest assured no harm, no bodily harm, has happened Hubert, whatever in the world has come on him to keep him away so long. There is no one in the country would do him any harm, or that would be interested in waylaying him but Master Benjamin Edwards. Yes, that must be it! That long-legged misshapen devil has had a hand in the matter surely."

"I wonder, sir, you are not afraid to speak so slightly of my papa's intended son-in-law," added Miss Darcus, drawing herself up with as pretty a haughty stare of annoyance and majesty as could be fancied.

"I beg your and your intended husband's pardon, for being so blind to his many perfections as to forget for a moment my prudence," answered Ned, following in his companion's vein of humour; and, bowing low and humbly as a token of regret at his boldness, as it were, he continued: "so lest I offend again, I'll take myself off and see his serene and most mighty highness, Master Benjamin Edwards, husband that is to be, of the Lady Annie Darcus, the peerless beauty of Heather Hall."

Not waiting for a reply, scarcely noticing how her eyes filled with tears, as an image of Hubert, torn, mangled and dead, rose up in fancy's eye before her, and not pausing to answer her warning,—“Be sure and come early in the morning to tell me your news,”—he ran away, and sped towards Rosedale.

In Rosedale mansion all the inhabitants were buried in pro-

foundest repose, when Ned aroused the watch-dogs by his knocking and ringing. The united barkings, rappings and ringings soon resulted in an upper window's being thrown up, while a head was poked out so as to be partly visible, and Sir Alexander's voice was heard, in the well-known demand—"Who's there?"

At another time, Ned would have amused himself by a little chaffing and scaring of the poltroon baronet; but his feelings were too much interested in the matter on hand for him to indulge in badinage.

"I want to see Master Benjamin, Sir Alexander, on a matter of life and death: tell him I only want to speak a few words to him."

"Ben has not been home to-night, whoever you are. I locked the doors myself, and assure you he is not within the walls of Rosedale. Who wants him?"

The remark is frequently made, and its truth is as proverbial, that the tone of an assurance or denial is more unmistakable than any verbal criteria: Ned McCool was convinced to a certainty that the baronet was speaking the truth, from the earnest tones in which he asserted Master Benjamin's absence. Without replying to the last question, therefore, he simply said—

"I believe you, Sir Alexander, and am sorry I have disturbed your rest;—Good night."

The baronet slammed down the window for his reply, and Ned, much annoyed and disheartened, walked slowly away from the house, muttering as he did so:—

"Now I am certain that this young ape of a disappointed heir of an Edwards has some hand in this disappearance of Hubert, if not at the bottom of it; and if he has I'll watch him for it, should it be for years. And how will I watch him? He has not been at home to-night,—that is suspicious. He will surely be home before daylight—that is pretty certain. So then if I

remain about here somewhere, and watch for him, I'll be sure to nab him as he gets home. Yes, I'll do that,—for a couple of hours at least."

With the muttering of this resolution, Ned threw himself under a tree on the lawn, but in such a position as to command a good view of the Rosedale Mansion, and of the avenue and entrance gate also.

He had good reason to rejoice in his determination; for scarcely had he glanced half-a-dozen times up and down the avenue, when, by the dim glimmering of the few stars that sparkled overhead, he noticed a figure approaching up the avenue. Peering keenly and steadily through the haziness as the nightwalker drew near, his heart beat high and fast as he recognised Master Benjamin!

It was indeed that individual, who, as he came nearer his home, was not a little surprised to find a hand suddenly but firmly placed on his shoulder, while at the same moment a warning voice sounded at his very side:—"Be no way frightened, Master Benjamin, no harm is intended you."

"Ned McCool!" ejaculated he at once.

"Yes. What have you done with Hubert Santley?"

A movement, unexpected by Ned, then took place.

His companion extended his right hand, as if to give the grasp of friendship, but Ned, after the scenes in which he knew the other had been implicated during the preceding twenty-four hours, seemed disinclined to accept it.

"Take my hand McCool," said Master Benjamin as he noticed Ned's indecision, though in no way apparently offended at the coolness; "you needn't fear to do so now, however bad an opinion you must have of me from what you found me doing not many hours ago. I was Hubert Santley's enemy yesterday; I am his friend now, and I am the enemy of his enemy. Come on

with me to the house. My explanation is too long for us to stand in the night air while you hear it, but come away, and I'll tell you all."

"One word before you go—who is this enemy of Hubert that you are now against?" demanded Ned.

"Colonel Warburton," freely replied the other.

"Ha! then we have both of us accounts to settle with that gentleman!" exclaimed Ned; "and between us we'll likely give him a dose that'll do his heart good. You'll be coming away with me when you hear my story, I expect; for it's time Colonel Warburton was put from doing more harm than he has already done in this part of the country."

Even dark as it was, the speaker could catch the glance of mingled astonishment and vengeance with which Master Benjamin regarded him as he so freely threatened the colonel. Ned stopped.

"Explain that look, Master Edwards, before we go any farther."

"Pshaw, man; I'm not angry at you. 'Tis only that every moment brings something regarding that man, Warburton, that makes me shudder for my connection with him, and pant for vengeance on him."

"Not vengeance, that is not in our hands; but justice for his crimes, and measure for the injuries he inflicted on the innocent people he harmed." Ned McCoel loved justice. Who should not?

They had arrived at the mansion as Ned was speaking. While Master Benjamin was knocking he told Ned: "My father," said he; "has a habit of always locking up the doors and windows every night himself, and would not suffer a latch-key to be used in the house."

"Open the door, father; I want in," was the reply given by

Benjamin when Sir Alexander threw open the window as he had done at Ned's knocking the short time before.

Comfortably seated in Master Benjamin's own room, where we have already seen him once or twice before, Ned heard from his companion a story that amazed him more and more, and angered him more and more at the colonel.

"And look, McCool," concluded Master Benjamin, as he finished his recital; "I know much about Mr. Santley's absence; I was, in fact, chiefly instrumental in arranging for his seizure and a ten years' absence for the reasons I have told you; now, however, my feelings are changed, and I am as much in his favour as I was against him yesterday. And yet, telling you this, I advise you, honestly and sincerely, to cease your search for him till the time the Clinker's messenger returns from England, and gives us a certain foundation to build up our plans upon."

"Let me know where and how Hubert is hid," said Ned, after a pause; "let me get telling him of our plans and our intentions, and advise him to have patience; let me have the opportunity of seeing him often; and I cheerfully agree to leave him in bondage for the time you say."

"You know the 'Tinker's Rock' on the side of Croghry Hill, McCool, and have probably often heard of the cave that's in the hill: well, in that cave Mr. Santley is, or is to be, imprisoned, for I don't know if he has been taken yet, though I am to be told as soon after his capture as possible."

"But there is no entrance to Croghry cave, for the mouth has been blocked up for years!" ejaculated Ned, wonderingly. He had frequently visited the place himself, and even tried to get in to explore the inside, but in vain.

"But there is an entrance, M'Cool, though 'tis so generally thought there's none. The colonel and I gave Henry Donaldson five hundred pounds to seize Santley, and we are to give him five hundred a year while he holds him. We have an agree-

ment too with Donaldson, that we are to have entrance to the cave any time we choose; and I know that the colonel's object in making that stipulation was, that he might make arrangements to take Santley away from the country altogether, as soon as I would let him into Rosedale property."

"When may you expect to hear from Donaldson?"

"If Mr. Santley be well kidnapped, which I think he is by this time, I'll certainly hear of it early this morning."

"I wonder very, very much," said Ned, slowly and solemnly, "that Henry Donaldson would move hand, tongue, or foot to injure Hubert Santley."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Master Benjamin; and he accompanied his exclamation with a wondering, interrogative stare, that plainly asked Ned for an explanation.

"Did you never hear what Hubert did for him?"

A negative shake of the head.

"You didn't? Well, that's maybe not so wonderful either, as it wouldn't do to talk about it; but Donaldson and six or seven of his gang were taken prisoners and were all lying in Derry gaol. Of course they would all have to swing for it; but they managed to break out of the gaol and get a short distance away before their escape was discovered. Then the hue and cry got up, and the soldiers started in search. The robbers separated, no two of them keeping together, but Donaldson and Jordan; and after a little they had to separate too, the pursuit was coming so close on them. Donaldson ran on by 'Adamnan's Bridge,' and would surely have been taken again, for he was tagged out with the chains and manacles he was carrying from the gaol, never taking a minute along the road to get them broken; but he met Hubert near the 'Bridge,' and begged him to help him off with his chains. Hubert did so; he broke the handcuffs on Donaldson's wrists and the chains off his ankles, and set him free, and even put the pursuers on a wrong scent. Donaldson

got off. Yes, I am very, very much surprised that he would do anything on Hubert!"

"That accounts for Donaldson's telling Warburton and me that he wouldn't have taken ten five hundreds to seize Mr. Santley, had he known in time whom he was to capture," said Master Benjamin.

"That satisfies me somewhat that Donaldson is not ungrateful. I'd venture to bet a good round sum that Warburton suffers from his hands before long; for the robber is a man who will do what he threatens; and you tell me he has threatened the colonel."

A silence followed. Ned seemed debating within himself on the propriety or impropriety of some proceeding he meditated; and it was not till after some minutes' meditation that he arrived at a satisfactory decision on the matter.

"I was about to explain some matters that may seem mysterious to you now, Master Benjamin," said Ned, when his hesitation vanished; "but on second thought, I consider it more advisable to remain silent for a short time longer. But tell me, what do you intend doing should Hubert be really Sir Alexander's son?"

"Though my plans are only half formed, I'll trust them to you. In the morning I'll ask my father for as much as will pay my debts; if he consents, as I think he will, I'll pay Warburton at once, and remain here only till the mystery about the true heir is cleared up one way or another; if the decision be favourable to me, I have no difficulty; if unfavourable, I'll leave Ireland privately, seek out my parentage, and may never more be heard of here, or shall return changed in name and appearance, and rich enough to buy anything I wish, and die here, old, unknown, and uncared for. If my father refuses me the money, I'll——"

"I'll give it to you until you are rich enough to pay me. You

knew I'll have money plenty, and from all I hear, two or three hundred thousand would scarcely be missed. You can repay me at leisure; and if you never do, I'll forgive you."

The repentant young man sprang forward and seized Ned by the hand, while the tears filled his eyes. His heart, that neither trouble, pain, nor poverty could have wrung, was open to kindness; he repressed not the drops that slowly trickled down his yet youthful cheeks, but rather seemed to delight in showing Ned how heartfully he appreciated and felt the value of the offering.

"Would to God!" he exclaimed; "that I had known your nature sooner! Would that I had, for then would I have never been in debt, never have been a drinking gambler, never have been owing that demon Warburton thousands for ministering to my follies and passions. Oh, McCool,—but I need not warn you!—keep from debt, for of all the miseries and unhappiness that make a man's life wretched and his nights sleepless, that is the worst. Keep from debt, and the grey hairs will remain longer a stranger to you; keep from debt, and the furrowed forehead is not so soon thy heritage; keep from debt, and your eyes wont grow prematurely sunken; keep from debt, and your looks grow not habitually downcast; keep from debt, and you need never be the flatterer or the crouching slave; keep from debt, and your carriage is more upright and elastic; keep from debt, and your conscience will not be unceasingly stinging you, nor your creditors ever dunning you; keep from debt, keep from debt. Though I am bad at times, McCool, I am not all naturally bad; there are some good principles in my composition; and it will be my future labour to improve and increase the good in me, and suppress or eradicate the bad. This is my firm resolution, and may Heaven and man be to me as I am sincere in my resolve."

If there be

"Looks and tones that dart
An instant sunshine through the heart,"

so there are "looks and tones that dart" language so unutterably expressive of sorrowings, heartburnings, disappointments, or joys, pleasures or happinesses, that written language fails in depicting them fully. And such was the case with Master Benjamin as he warned Ned of his own mistakes. He was so unmistakably sincere, so entirely maddened at his own foolishness, so thrillingly hopeful and repentant, that Ned, in his inmost heart, pitied him, and determined to assist him.

"And next to staying out of it, Master Benjamin, is the getting out of it, when in it. To this last point, then, you may demand my assistance any time, and to any extent you like."

Some more such conversation followed, which resulted in Ned's consenting, at Master Benjamin's request, to remain at Rosedale, if only for a couple of hours; as it was so long since Hubert was missed from Castleporter, and if he were actually seized, he,—that is, Master Benjamin—would hear of it very soon.

"More especially," argued he, "as I know that Colonel Warburton will not be at home for some hours, to meet Donaldson's messenger, who will therefore come on direct to me. So if you remain, you may find it the most successful course, and the most expeditious one besides."

And so Ned waited. And through the window the "darkness just before the dawn" could be distinguished, but no messenger came. And anon, the first uncertain streaks of day brightened the east; and a knocking was heard at the door; and when the key was procured from Sir Alexander, and the new comer permitted to enter, Master Benjamin preceded him to the room, and the lamp burning there showed Ned McCool the features of Henry Donaldson himself!

CHAPTER XVII.

Let us return, now that we have reached this stage, and see how it has fared with the Clinker, and how he has been progressing since the fight. During the remaining hours of the fair evening he lay absolutely insensible; nor till the night was well towards midnight was there any visible change towards consciousness. About midnight, however, he began to show signs of returning life. He tossed about on his bed, turning and sighing and moaning continuously. He seemed to feel unable to understand anything; to have lost all remembrance of past immediate occurrences; and to be, as it were, in a most mysterious labyrinth of indistinctness. By degrees, but slowly, his mind grew clear, and his memory returned, and with the return of memory came a vivid recollection of the day's maddening defeats, succeeded by a short, though dangerous, relapse into insensibility. When he recovered from this he seemed struggling hard to be calm, and, to a great degree, was successful. After numerous attempts and repeated failures, he at length managed to gain the sitting position, but sat more like a drunk man than anything else. Resting in that posture for a little, he then got his feet to the floor, and managed, staggeringly, to stand upright, but it was dismal staggering indeed. Still giddy and unsteady, he laboured to cross the room to the door. Holding on to chairs or tables or the wall, he succeeded in his attempt. By a fortunate chance, a fellow-soldier was passing at the moment; "Tell Joshua Percy, comrade, I wish to speak to him," said the Clinker.

Joshua Percy soon entered the room of the Clinker, when the latter addressed him:—"You are sworn, Percy, to obey me in all things I order, provided you risk neither your life nor a punishment?"

"I have so sworn, Huxley, and on my oath be it to keep my word."

"Then I want you to go to England to-morrow, and deliver a message from me to a comrade of mine stationed in Lincoln. Colonel Warburton will sign your furlough, and I'll give you money enough for the journey. Can you be ready to start early in the morning, before the men are moving about through the barrack?"

"I can go in an hour."

"And that is better. Just get away to-night."

"And what message am I to take?"

"The message will be in a letter, and you are to deliver this letter to the comrade whose name will be on the letter."

"Am I to have any parcel back with me?"

"That's as it may be. If you get a letter, see that you let no one get even a knowledge that you have it; much less see what will be in the inside, till you give it into my hands. Be cautious, or——"

Whatever power the Clinker had over poor Percy, the threat, unfinished as it was, acted as a sufficient guard against betrayal, and an incentive to proper and secret management, of the Clinker's message and the reply, by his messenger.

It was some time after midnight when Percy left the Clinker's bed-room to make preparations for his journey. The Clinker, meanwhile, struggled to write a few lines during Percy's absence; when the latter, therefore, returned, he found his furlough filled and signed by the colonel, and the letter promised by the Clinker ready also, while the latter warned him: "Now, Percy, this business is no trifle; it will either bring me hundreds and gratify my revenge besides, or will go far to take my life. If you do the work well and to my satisfaction, I'll return you that paper; but if you spoil it, or disappoint me, by ——, the next hour your

paper is in the colonel's hands, and a drum-head court-martial will sit on you the next day. Here's ten pounds for you. You may take my horse, and ride him into Belfast, and stable him well there, then go on to England, and see you do all right. Read the writing on that letter."

And the messenger read, "*Zedekiah Ramsay, Sojers barracks, lincon, Hengland.*"

As Joshua Percy moved through the barrack yard towards the stables, he was tapped on the shoulder. Looking round he recognised the intruder to be Master Benjamin Edwards. That gentleman was left in Colonel Warburton's apartments, when the colonel was summoned away so hastily to Castleporter, not leaving, however, till he had injected a dangerous poison into Master Ben's mind, that was likely to germinate and grow into mischief yet. And in the colonel's rooms did Master Benjamin remain, concocting plans of revenge, and forming resolutions of vengeance. And there he stayed; stayed on till he heard the colonel returning; when he retired into the inner room,—his hiding-place earlier in the day—and remained there, hidden behind the bed, during a long conversation the colonel had with some visitor whose voice sounded extremely like the junior lieutenant's, hearing every word, and smiling in malicious anticipations, as some sentence of the colonel implicated the speaker in an illegal, a dishonourable, or a dangerous undertaking. The colonel and his visitor departed, the former returned again, departed, and again returned, and finally left as if for a long absence. Emerging from his covert, Master Benjamin was next startled by a stir proceeding from the Clinker's apartment, which, for convenience sake between the colonel and his leviathan servant, had been procured adjoining the master's. The stir continued, and then came the summons for Joshua Percy. Moving nearer, our eavesdropper heard the conversation between the Clinker and his victim. Retiring as Percy was leaving the first time, he listened again on his return, heard the reading of the address on the letter, and the directions and the threat; and determined to see the contents of the letter—important as it

must be, he argued, from the Clinker's caution about its safe delivery. Hence he followed Percy. The latter was startled to find a hand placed so suddenly and so silently on his shoulder, and wondered to see Master Benjamin Edwards there at that time of the night, though presuming it was all right, the gentleman being so intimate with the colonel. But he was still more astonished when the young man moved on to the stable, telling him to follow quickly, for that he was in a hurry and couldn't wait, as he had to return to the colonel, &c. In the stable, beside the lantern Percy had procured to get the horse fixed for himself, Master Ben suddenly addressed him.

"The colonel sent me down to see the letter his servant is after giving you; and lest you might be unwilling to give it, I am to tell you that he knows all about some paper, for that Oliver told him confidentially long ago about it."

Like many a man in a good cause, the soldier was deceived by the other's apparent frankness and knowledge of the secrets between himself and the Clinker, and he therefore handed over the letter to Master Ben without questioning or demur. Nor was the latter long in mastering its contents, misspelled, misshapen, and mysterious as the writing was. Thus it ran, in substance and spelling, though not in form:—

"Dr. Kumrade Ramsay give the Bearer of this letter the peapers about the Children which were changed in this Town long ago that you were tellin me of over our cups one night for the secret is neerly made out And unless you hurry you wull lose all your ekspectashuns by the hoath i took the night you first opened the thing te me i'll not ask to the valley of a day's pay of the munny you can root from the hold Barronet. Be in haste—Be in haste. Your Kumrade Oliver huxtley from Money-fin Barracks Ireland."

Such was the important production that Master Benjamin lied that he might get reading, which, having done, he again spoke.

"And the colonel said also, Percy, that you are to bring the answer to this to me when you come home before Huxtleys sees you at all. And more, you are never to speak to Warburton—the colonel—about this, by any means, as he will deny all knowledge in the matter, not wishing to get himself entangled among his servant's intrigues. You'll be sure not to forget?"

The soldier promised obedience, and Master Benjamin, rejoicing at the unexpected success he experienced, returned to the colonel's rooms. Here he cogitated for about twenty minutes, at the end of which time he moved towards Huxtleys's room. Rapping, and receiving an ill-accorded permission to enter, he opened the door and went in. Hardened and sinner as he was, he was shocked at the ghastly appearance of the conquered giant before him. The exertion of writing the letter and of arranging with his messenger had been too severe on the Clinker in his weak state; he was so overpowered as to be unable to reach his bed again after Percy's departure, and must have fallen, weak and exhausted on the floor; for on it was he labouring to rise when Master Benjamin entered. To help him to rise, assist him to his bed, and fix him in it, was no easy task for the visitor, and yet he did it. Did it, calmly, softly, and gently, almost as a mother would assist her sick child, though the moving impulse which acted in each was so different, so very different.

"I thought I would come in and see you, before I would go home, Oliver," began Master Benjamin; and he was about to condole with the invalid, when he was cut short by, "If you've any friendship for me, or any charity in you, fetch me a gill of brandy."

"But would it not be injurious to you?"

"What the h—ll concern is that of yours?"

"Oh, none at all, man, if you take on in that way! I'll bring you a bottle, if it please you."

And returning to the colonel's room, he filled out a large cup-

full of brandy; then taking a little bottle from an inside pocket, he poured a few drops into the liquid, muttering as he did so: "What angel or devil put it into my head to bring the bottle with me; though I had no notion then that it would be Oliver Huxley would be my first subject. Oh, no, I intended it for higher quarry."

The Clinker drank the liquid to the last drop, draining up the cup greedily, thanked the giver with a granting curse or two, turned over on the bed, and in five minutes was sleeping heavily.

"Now I'll see what he holds over Percy's head," muttered Master Benjamin to himself, as the other fell asleep. And searching till he found a bunch of keys, he then proceeded to open and examine two trunks that were in the room. A close, patient investigation yielded nothing from them. Old papers, old books, old buttons, old clothes, old letters, old brushes, rusty nails, worn-out gloves, little bottles of medicine, shirt buttons, and a million-and-one old heterogeneous collected useless trifles, were there, but nothing of importance. Through drawers, among the bed-clothes, in an old bureau, everywhere through the room, but vain the search.

Pausing in despair, he cast his eye around the room, seeking for some object yet unexamined, when his attention was rivetted on the old books. "The most likely place for a paper to be hidden," he exclaimed, as he tossed over leaf after leaf of book after book. Nor was his search this time unsuccessful; for from one of the old volumes did he exhume the following manuscript. He locked the door, and sat down, till he read the document:—

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF JOSHUA PERCY.

My father was principal manager of a banking establishment in a prosperous town in England, its name or definite locality I think it unwise and useless to mention, as I do not wish my real name ever to be discovered, or my whereabouts ever known by my relatives. My father held his situation in the bank when I

was born, and continued holding it till his death. His desire was that I should follow the same profession, but my inclinations and my passions were opposed to his intentions, and I fought against him. Despite of his entreaties, persuasions, and even commands, I refused to enter the bank. I wish to see more of life than I could there, I argued. But he told me of the long vacations I'd be getting several times a year, and how he would assist me to see the world. In vain all his advices or injunctions. Oh, that children could be taught to obey their parents, where that obedience is not abused. Oh, that they could only realise that for every harsh or disobedient word or act given to their parents Heaven will pour out in heartrending abundance the phials of his vengeance upon them. Mayhap my fate may be a warning to some. When they read of it, let them remember 'tis no fiction; it is downright reality.

When I was about seventeen years of age, my father called me into the breakfast parlour one morning, after breakfast, and said to me: "Charles," said he; I do not fear to give my real christian name, for it can in no way lead to my discovery;—"Charles," said my father; "I fear your inclinations verge towards evil rather than good. I have long been watching your conduct, and am now determined to speak plainly to you. I ask you as your father, Charles,—and you see my hairs are white—to obey me and cease your evil courses. I cannot bring my mind to the sad belief that you are naturally depraved, or that your heart will be closed to my parental counsels. Be warned—I ask you not to follow any one pursuit in preference to another, so that you decide on a respectable one, and give up your bad companions and bad habits; and among the press of business appointments you may forget your past associations, and become what your parents' fondest wishes hope and every day pray for."

Much more did he say of the same tenor, but I heeded him not. Some time after this, through a passing fancy, I actually became a business man, but one which helped rather to gratify my passions and excite them than to suppress them. In my new engagement I found much to satisfy, even to satiate my

irresistible craving for change and excitement. Whirling away from town to town, ever forming new acquaintance, ever seeing something strange and novel, and rarely at home, I soon grew forgetful of my parents, and worse than all, of my God! Sunday and Saturday were alike to me. England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, and France, were all equally familiar to me. I was well liked by my employers, and by all with whom I had dealings.

Thus I swam along in my stream of gambling, drinking, and general iniquity, till I reached my thirtieth year; when a circumstance occurred which changed the current of my existence for a time. I had landed in Dublin one evening from Liverpool, and after seeing my "traps" properly deposited in my hotel, I started for a ramble through the city that I might see some of my companions to arrange for our fun after dinner. I moved down Sackville-street, crossed the Liffey, and entered a gambling and drinking saloon. I did not remain in that hell-upon-earth long, but when I left, night was nearly fallen. I grew unwell, recrossed the Liffey again, determined to go to bed. I had just crossed the bridge, and had to stop about ten seconds to permit some cars and carts to leave the crossing clear, when a voice, close beside me, lowly yet distinctly, sobbingly ejaculated,

"Oh, kind Heaven, assist me!"

Bad as I was, I never was hard-hearted nor callous. Even in my drunkenest or wildest phases, I could freely give my last sovereign to relieve a charitable case. Therefore I turned round quickly as the sorrowing murmur smote upon my ear, and there, at my very elbow, stood a woman or rather a young girl. There was an indefinable halo around her, as she stood trembling in the dim hazy twilight, that assured me she was good. I asked her, lowering and softening my voice as I did so; "Have you lost your way?"

She glanced up into my face with a look so beaming of hopeful penetration and wishful sweetness, that it became instantaneously indelibly engraved on my memory. I have never

forgotten it; nor, while my sanity or my memory lasts, shall I. It has been the curse though also the blessing of my days; my curse, for my conduct to her; and my blessing, for her influence on me. But I am premising. She kept her gaze fixed on my countenance, and her eyes seemed to penetrate my very core, ere she spoke.

"I have only been two nights and three days in Dublin, Sir, and I fear I have wandered too far this evening, as I have lost my way, and cannot get home."

"May I ask what part of the city you wish to reach?" I enquired.

She told me. And indeed she had wandered far from the address she mentioned. I said if she would trust a stranger, I would see her home. Again she fixed that steady gaze on me.

"I will trust you," she said.

I gave her my arm, and we started for her residence. I knew Dublin well, and the slight indisposition I felt softened my manner, so that I was more than usually able to interest her. On her part she related her history to me. She was English, and was the only child of a rich Lancashire merchant. Her mother had died only two days after giving birth to this, her only child; and seven years afterwards, the father followed his wife, leaving all his property to his little daughter, under the guardianship of her father's cousin by marriage. This cousin was not only poor but unprincipled. As she grew towards womanhood, he began to persecute her to make her marry his son, whom she disliked. This persecution continued, and continued to increase in persistence and severity, until she feared for her safety, and could hence endure the annoyance no longer. Unexpectedly gaining possession of her father's will, she hid it, and with darkness shrouding her flight, she escaped to Liverpool, whence she sailed immediately for Dublin, where an old governess resided. Arrived safely there, she remained shut up in her friend's dwelling till the third evening, when she thought she

would take a ramble through the city. She was scarcely out a quarter of an hour, when she started as she recognised her guardian approaching. He, she could see, had perceived her. There was a side street turning off where she stood; she turned down it, and through it, and another and another, she knew not where, until, when she began to get alarmed, she found she was quite ignorant of her then position; and was becoming totally disheartened as she uttered the petitionary ejaculation which arrested my attention. In conclusion, she told me she would be twenty-one in five months, but that she knew her unnatural guardian would use every endeavour, legitimate or otherwise, to learn her place of refuge before her coming of age, and by seizing her, compel her to marry his son. By this time we had reached her temporary home, when she said :—

“I cannot ask you in to-night, but if you call to-morrow you will find that Helen Foster is not so ungrateful as she must now appear to be. Good night, Sir. May I not know your name?”

“Charles D——”

And we parted as we exchanged the usual grasping of hands.

I need scarcely say that I called to see her next day, and the next, and the next, and every day or night for the month I was remaining in the city. I began to feel that my happiness, nay, my very existence, depended on her, or was woven into her will. At length I was ordered to Cork. I went on my usual visit that evening, and showed her the letter I had received from my employers. She read it over and silently returned it. We were sitting on a sofa side by side.

“I suppose you will not be in Dublin when I get back?” I said, scarcely knowing how to offer her the boiling impulses that overflowed my constitution.

“My future is so uncertain and unsettled,” answered the beautiful girl, for beautiful beyond any female I ever met, more sensitively lovely, more really pure, more richly fair, was she, “that I can discern nothing certain in my movements.”

Somehow I could not help it. I did not intend it. But I told her my love; poured forth in words of gushing earnestness the torrents that surcharged my heart, and begged of her to give me the treasure of her priceless love in return. She was convinced by my sincerity, and was equally sincere. When I left the house that night we were affianced. How my soul bounded in joyous thrills for days! Everything wore the golden hue of happiness; every sound rang in the angelic tones of her consenting voice! In twelve months I was to demand her formally from her guardian; with his consent, or without it, she vowed to be mine. We parted.

I went to Cork, thence in succession to Paris, London, Glasgow, Manchester, Belfast, and a host of smaller towns. Helen and I were not to write for the year. For weeks, yes, for seven months, I gave up all my irreligious practices. Not a card in my hands, never intoxicated, never from service on Sundays, ever regular for seven months after the parting in Dublin. In Dover I again relapsed. And now, as if from the long curbing, my passions pulled me on to my destruction, with irresistible, overwhelming impetuosity. I gambled, drank, cursed, and, maddened by losses and expenses, I embezzled. A few pounds at first, then hundreds, then thousands, did I defraud my employers of. None of my companions could equal my lavish expenditure; and, when they attempted to reason with me, I mocked their parsimony, and grew more boisterous and more maddened myself.

One night in Glasgow, we were at the cards. I had lost heavily, yet continued to play on. Infuriated, delirious, wretched by drink and losses, I boasted—boasted in a public gaming saloon! Heavens!—of my approaching marriage with a lovely millionaire—a splendid heiress—only child—and so on. Next morning, a strange address on one of my letters caught my eye. It bore a Lancashire post-mark. Could it be from Helen? I asked myself. I had never seen her writing, and could not say. I opened the missive, and found it to contain but three words:
"a man."

Ha, there was some one playing the spy on my conduct then ! The hellish suggestion added increased fuel to the fire of passions that was burning up my very heart's core ! I hastened on in my insane career of drunkenness and debaucheries of all descriptions, until at length the year was spent, save three days. I sped to Dublin, and began to meditate on my actions since I last was there. My intoxications, my losses, my gamblings, my boastings, my evil haunts, my embezzlements, all my intemperateness rose up in magnified horror before me, in that hour of meditation and peaceful calmness. I cursed my companions, I cursed drink, I cursed cards, I cursed my crimes ; yes, and in my delirium, I blasphemed ! Oh, that awful, fearful, terrible hour of sad, sad, sad retrospection !

Calmness returned at length, and I resolved to visit my affianced bride, throw myself on my knees before her, ask her to forgive me, and to prove me for another period before she would refuse me or withhold her forgiveness. After this resolution I felt greatly better, and started for Helen's residence.

Passing along, I met one of those decoy ducks of the devil—men whose souls are the devil's ; who breathe and carry hell's gifts about with them through society ; who never miss an opportunity of doing the business of Satan ;—and this messenger of God's enemy, this curse of earth, invited me to a glass of brandy. I refused, and would to Heaven that I had persisted in my refusal. He forced his cursed friendship on me, though I told him I was going to meet my betrothed. He forced, and he prevailed. I drank the cursed brandy, but I could not stop at one glass ; I drank and drank and we drank on, and when we rose to leave, I was staggering. Oh, that horrid, terrible evening ! I went to Helen's house, much sobered on the way, and my companion accompanied me part of the way. But for him, I'd have gone to my lodgings ; but he thwarted my inclinations ; his master and prompter, the devil, whispered him to take me to my doom, and again he prevailed.

I reached the residence I had left her in, for I knew, intuitively

knew, that there I should find her. I entered. She rose to bid me welcome; with the sweet love beaming from her pure eyes, and pure affection traced in every lineament of her fair countenance; but suddenly she became pale and motionless as a marble Venus; her eyes pierced with their glances of love into my soul. Oh, God! how the words she uttered, the scathing though merited words, burned into my inmost core, like molten globes of boiling lead; and there have they remained since, reproachful, ineffaceable prints of my hellish inebriety!

"Charles D.—, I loved you, love you yet, as I once thought I could never love human being after my father's death. I pledged you my faith, and I promised you my hand, for my heart was yours from the first night we met. I met your father by chance, and he told me of your habits, as he considered it was his duty to do so, but I learned you had improved, and I blessed myself for being the cause of such amendment. But I heard again your old ways had come over you, and then I pitied you, but kept hoping on. I was often near you even in your maddest mood. I heard of your boasting in Glasgow that night and found means to send you the warning with our Lancashire post-mark. All that I could have forgiven, and I have done so; but coming here with the smell of drink about you, with the stamp of intemperance on your face, in your eyes, and issuing with your every breath, this, oh, this, Charles, is more than I can forget. Go! I forgive you my blighted hopes and broken heart. I forgive you all the pain you have inflicted on me; but, oh, Charles D.—, repent and become a good member of society! I shall never live to see it; but if spirits can commune with those on earth, I shall rejoice when you become a changed man; and comfort you... Go, and may the God of forgiveness forgive you, as I do."

And I left. I said no word, not a syllable. To have gained heaven and annihilated hell, I could not have replied to those words of Helen Foster. I slunk away, only giving her a parting glance such as a lost soul might give towards God after a sight of Heaven. I sought my former companions and sank lower and

lower towards brutality each day. Delirious fits now began to attack me, but I fought them off. I went to Lancashire one gloriously lovely summer day; the birds chirruped their thrilling carols on high; the beautiful flowers smiled up in sweetest response to the bright tints; all earth was gay, and everything was happy, and blooming, and joyous, save my heart;—there all was war, madness, unhappiness, turmoil: I met a funeral procession. My heart smote me, for I knew I was a murderer! I instinctively felt that the remains of Helen Foster had been borne past me. I followed to the churchyard; and I, the murderer, stood over the grave, while the pure spirit of my pure victim looked down from heaven, as her body was deposited in its last, its narrow home. And I knelt by the grave till it was filled up, and when the rites were finished, I asked a bystander who that leading mourner was? "Her guardian's son," was the reply. "That her guardian wished her to marry?" I continued. "The same," my informant again replied. I had the whole secret now. The man whom I had so often met, who was ever foremost in exciting my passions, who filled me to intoxication that fatal evening in Dublin,—that young man stood before me, my murderer and hers both, and he could now roll in luxury with her wealth. Forbid it, Heaven! And over her grave, her newly made grave, I swore he should die, and by my hand. I thought not then of the future. I only felt that he was a double murderer, and I was the avenging demon on his track—I only panted for revenge. Even then, I was mad, my brain whirled, my head reeled, the one prominent idea took possession of my soul. I ran to the town and drank, drank deeply. Then when night came on, I went to his residence with a stout stick in my hand; I asked to see him; he came to the door; I decoyed him along the road; and then, with the suddenness and ferocity of an enraged tigress, I leaped upon, I struck him down, trampled upon him in the infuriated joy of a revenging madness; struck him again and again till no spark of life remained. I then fled again to the town, and drank deep and deeper. The last impression on my mind was that I was among red-coats; existence became a blank, and my memory failed me. When I recovered

my consciousness, I was surrounded by soldiers, and was told that I had enlisted. I believed the story, am in the army since, and known only under the false name of

JOSHUA PERCY.

"So this is the power Huxley wields over Percy's head," muttered Master Benjamin, as he finished the manuscript; "I'll hold it, for it gives me the same hold." The speaker folded up the paper, placed it carefully in an inner pocket, found his way home, encountered Ned McCool, as already related, and gave him a narration of the incidents contained in this present chapter, which now ends.

CHAPTER XVIII.

It was not yet breakfast time, scarcely seven o'clock, of the morning on which Ned and Master Benjamin had such a satisfactory interview in Rosedale, when two different groups were in sad mortification. Who were they? Let us see.

One of the groups was composed of four men, masked, gagged and bound and infuriated, though necessarily silent, lying imprisoned in one of the dark cellars of Castleporter. Before them stood three men, two masked; the third our mysterious, ubiquitous friend, the negro.

"Search dese debils," was darkey's order to his companions.

Despite the strugglings and opposition of the four prisoners, they were speedily and thoroughly searched. From one of them was exhumed a bundle of papers, marked on the outside as "The Will and Confession of Sophia Porter, of Castleporter House, Magheraporter, Spinster."

"Remoob dem mask tings," was darkey's next command.

And again despite the resistance, the masks were quickly removed, revealing the well-known countenances of, as the captors shouted, as each mask was torn away:—

"Lieutenant Snatchley!"

"Corporal Upland!"

"Private Dubbingdale!"

"Colonel Warburton, by St. Peter! The thief and robber! Stealing Miss Porter's Will."

"Rameob dem obercoats now," darkey again commanded.

This was somewhat more troublesome, but was also accomplished; not, however, without the negro's assistance. The colonel and lieutenant were in plain clothes; but the other two wore the regimental dress.

"Loosen dem gags," darkey again ordered.

Heavens! Such a volley of oaths, blasphemies, imprecations, as burst from the captives when their utterance was freed. The negro and his companions turned to the lantern light burning beside them, and began examining the papers they had found in the colonel's pocket. Miss Porter's will was there in all its completeness; save the first portion which, the reader may remember, bequeathed all to her intended husband.

"Smart enough," whispered the negro to his friends; "he made a good struggle to have Castleporter to himself, but please God we'll defeat him now, and make this defeat and punishment satisfy him for ever. Slip up to the library," and he directed his words to one of his companions; "and in the writing desk, which is now broken likely, you may find the other part of this paper. Bring it down till we put all together, and hide them more securely this time."

The required part was found as the negro suspected. The cursings of the four men had ceased, or were become inaudible.

Much has been said as to Colonel Warburton's character and that of his associate, Oliver Huxley; the following true incidents regarding Corporal Upland will still further show the pitch to which the colonel's tendencies had fallen.

The first event I am going to mention occurred in a shoemaker's workshop in Glasgow. Shoemakers invariably keep up a somewhat interesting conversation at their labour, especially should a few customers drop in for their work. On a calm March night as the tradesmen, to whom I refer, plied their awl and end, a soldier dropped in for a pair of boots to be half-soled. He sat down, and the chat ran loose and cheerful. An old pensioner sat at work, and he and the soldier commenced to chaff each other. Then they began to curse; and even bantered

each other which of them could curse the worst. It was fearful, shocking! The wonder was that fire and brimstone didn't descend from Heaven, as in the days of old, and wither the fierce brutes to cinders! The laugh and jest passed round as each curse flowed from the unhallowed lips more awful, more terrible than the preceding one. At length Corporal Upland—for the soldier was that individual—uttered one oath, more devilishly shocking, more hellishly Satanic, than any previously spoken. The words were scarcely from his lips, the gaze of wonderment and fear still sat on his companions' countenances, when the whole house—and the men sat in a fifth story room—shook as if undulating by an earthquake; the thunder pealed, the lightning flashed, and a blue light shone through the workshop. All immediately grew quiet again; no harm was done; but there were some habitual swearers in that apartment at that moment, and across their lips there never again passed an oath. Such is one incident of Corporal Upland's life. It is true. So is the following:—

The market-house in Moneyfin was a two-story house; the upper part being used for no particular purpose, for at one time it was a house of prayer, at another it was the theatre of an itinerant company of players, while again it was the court-house, the public lecture-room, or the school-house; while the under story of the building consisted of a number of arches in which many hawkers, pedlars, fishwomen, fruitwomen, &c., &c., disposed of their respective wares.

Resident in the locality and frequent visitors to Moneyfin was a gentleman's family, whom we may name Spencer. The second son, commonly named Master George, had two characteristic peculiarities,—he was a most notorious, inveterate swearer, and a horseman unequalled through all his acquaintance. Though soldiers in general are pretty fair cursers, Corporal Upland out-heroded Herod in this unenviable qualification. His fame in this respect, or rather his infamy, having reached Master George Spencer, the latter was uneasy that a rival should exist so convenient. They happened to meet one day in one of the arches

above referred to, and were both giving "blessings backwards,"—as some geniuses denominate cursing;—when, to satisfy their whim, they made a bet to try which of them was the greater swearer. My readers will pardon me from giving any of the oaths—I could do so;—suffice it to say that Corporal Upland won. Master George, a short time afterwards, was going to Dublin, by the stage coach; and, though having an inside seat, he chose to sit beside the driver as the day was fine, and for the purpose of smoking and chaffing as they passed along. Leaning a little too far over, he lost his balance, fell on the road; and when the horses were pulled up, and the guard and some passengers ran back for him, his life was gone—his neck was broken—one of his eyes had been gouged out by a sharp stone on which he had fallen!

Such the end of such a fearful mocker and swearer!

Will the story have a warning to others? That it may is my object in writing it.

But to return.

"Colonel Warburton," said one of the negro's companions, who had evidently been instructed previously, "for the second time within these twenty-four hours you have been caught in an ungentlemanly act, and both times you have been beaten. Before, you were a thief in intention, though not in deed, but that was not your fault. Now you are a thief both in intention and act, caught with the stolen property in your possession, and caught, too, in the very act. What, then, can you say why you should not, at this minute, and by our hands, get the punishment you deserve?"

"You have no authority to punish me," gurgled that officer; "if you attempted such an outrage, my men here would see that retribution should be inflicted in an infinite degree."

"You are in our power, Colonel Warburton, and I'm told it's a favourite song of you Englishmen that power covers all things; at least, I'm told you've been putting that maxim in practice

wherever you could, an' I think you can't think we're too stretching in our power if we folly your lead. Therefore since we have the power we have the right. And as for your soldiers here, why I used to be told that the accomplice was as bad and as deserving of punishment as the leader, so don't you think that they must get share of your penalty. And even we let them away this minnit, what could they do to us? Shure they don't know us? Maybe they'll never see us again; so you see, wise colonel that you are, we disregard both your boasts and your threats. Try some other plan."

"But I have done nothing yet, either last night or to-night, that would warrant you in taking my life," he objected.

"We don't care a thirteen for your sneaking, cowardly life, colonel; but the punishment you will undergo will be remembered by you the longest day of your life, and after too; and it will be a warning as well to all who hear of it to shun your example and fellowship. We will not kill you; that is too speedy a punishment, nor will you lose leg nor foot nor hand nor arm, though we will put you that to your dying hour you will be sorry for being ever bad, or following the devil's temptations. You might have been a good man, but you chose to be wicked, and for your crimes, you'll loss your tongue."

"Hell and furies! Devils or men!" exclaimed the colonel, trembling all over; "take my life at once rather than that."

"We think more of takin' a life than young Gauger Warburton did some twenty or five and twenty years ago when he shot down the young girl that was running away with the worm of the still," interposed the negro's big companion, and who had been lately silent up till now; "we think more of taking a life than the young man did who swore to marry Miss Sophia Porter, but deserted her, basely deserted her, the unhung villain that he was, and made her life aimless and careless till she lies above us this early morning a corpse, made so by the broken heart that that young man, that young gauger, brought to her

by his false promises and his false faith; we think more of taking a life than the young man did who went with loaded pistol to take the life of Ellen O'Ronan long ago, but whose oaths and courage quailed before that fair Irish maiden; we think more of taking a life than Colonel Warburton did when he issued his order for all intruders over night to be shot without parley, and who was himself near being the first victim—do you remember your danger on the wall, colonel?—we think more of taking a life than you do; but we'll maim you; we'll put you from ever again giving the word of command to your troop to hunt down, stab, tramp, shoot and flog every damned Irish whelp they come across, for they're 'rebels in their hearts, those H Irish are,' you sneeringly say. And if ever we be rebels, who makes us so, colonel? It is you, and such vile scum of brutal, vicious, money-hunting, cowardly foreigners, as you are, who are sent over here to keep us in peace and subjection, but who, instead, try by every means in their power to goad us into disaffection or rebellion, and then vilely calumniate us; and if we dare to complain, then we are 'those damned H Irish rebels!' You are placed on our benches to give us law, but God pity the Irish peasant who goes before you. Take your life, you mean cur! No, you at least shall feel the punishment you deserve; that all such as you deserve."

The colonel was so astounded, so overwhelmed, so stupefied, so afraid, at this burst from the negro's companion—and in no rustic dialect either!—that no sound escaped him; the steady, wondering, glaring stare of his eyes was the only life-sign in him, so immobile was he, under the withering taunts of his gaoler. Nor even when the latter ceased, did the unfortunate man attempt to reply. There are many whose rusticity or ignorance vanishes under excitement.

The three other soldiers were awe-struck, too; but not from the same feeling as their officer; he feared, they only wondered, wondered at the daring of any mere mortal's attempting so bravely and so boldly to defy that master, whose frown to them was so terrible, whose anger was so dangerous, and whose temper

was so uncertain. Had they dared, they would have given vent to their feelings in shouts of joy, for not one of them save the lieutenant but had felt the lash, from the unsteady, choleric disposition of their colonel. A faint glimmering of their satisfaction shone on their countenances; it was noticed by their superior, and the threatening look of fiercest, deadliest hate which he gave them, actually caused them, wild and soul-hardened as they were, to shudder.

The colonel was lifted up on a bench that stood in the cellar, and bound to it, feet, hands, body and head; then the negro's companions approached him, while one of them pulled a razor from his pocket and opened out the keen, shining blade. They approached, up to his very head. The man that held the razor then put forth his left hand, caught the colonel's chin, and nodded to his masked companion to come forward and open the mouth, that he might get hold of the tongue.

At this moment the negro stepped forward, signed to his assistants to pause for a little, and addressed the now nearly demented colonel. The reader will again pardon or thank me for translating the nigger speech.

"You see, Colonel Warburton, that you are entirely in our power, and that we are determined, as we have the opportunity, to consummate on you the punishment we threaten. To show you, however, that we are influenced by no mere feeling of revenge, but that we simply wish to inflict a just retaliation on you for your many acts of injustice, we will give you choice of three, ay, of four alternatives. Listen then, colonel. You may lose your tongue, which is number first choice. You will sign this paper, which has been written out for your signature, and that is choice number two. You will write out your resignation of your command of the colonelcy, giving therewith the true reasons for such resignation to our satisfaction. Or, you will give me a receipt in full of all the debts, money or otherwise, due you by Master Benjamin Edwards, giving me authority also, at the same time, to get from your residence any papers

which I may find bearing on those debts, and that is the last of the choices I give you. Mind also that whichever one of them you choose must be done to our satisfaction. Think over them while I am counting three hundred, and decide before I finish, for if you wait till I'm done, you have no choice then but to take what we like to give. One—two—three—four—five," &c., &c.

What a scene it was, that in Castleporter that morning! The colonel was truly in a dilemma! Any one of the alternatives was a too bitter pill to swallow, too hard to digest. To lose the tongue was terrible, too terrible to be thought of for a moment; to resign his hold on Master Benjamin after so many years' waiting and plotting, and so lose so glorious a revenge, so long anticipated, was nearly equally bitter; to resign his high, his honourable position of colonelcy, and to accompany such resignation with the confession of all his acts to the satisfaction of his taskmasters—no, that he could never do! And then, the fourth—to sign that paper—ha, but what did the paper contain? That was a loophole, too sweet to be left untried.

"Here, you black devil, what paper am I to sign? You didn't tell me its contents."

The negro, as the colonel spoke, had reached to "one hundred and thirty-five," but he ceased immediately, and pulled a paper from a pocket.

"This is the paper you are to sign, colonel; I forgot to read it for you, but I think it makes no great difference. 'I, Ronald Warburton, colonel in His Majesty's regiment of ———, do, driven thereto by a force I cannot resist, make this, my candid avowal, and hereby deliver myself up to the law, to be dealt with as may be found fit. I confess to having murdered'——"

"Perdition seize me if I do any such madness," interrupted the colonel; "I'll free young Edwards from his debts, and cursed be he and you for it. Give me pens and ink and I'll write the receipt."

"You have cursed Master Benjamin Edwards and me, colonel, and I never like to be cursed; will you beg my pardon for it before we go any farther?" demanded the negro.

"To h—l with you and him," ejaculated the colonel.

"That's two curses, colonel; you'll have to make two apologies."

"Give me writing materials," ordered the colonel.

"Beg our pardons," rejoined the negro; "say, I'm sorry for cursing you, twice, and we'll then get to business."

The colonel remained silent.

"Get ready."

The negro gave the order to his companions, and the three approached their victim. One of them caught his chin and his nose, another opened his mouth with a knife and was going to put a stick across to keep it open, when he gurgled out the required apology; "I'm sorry for cursing you; I'm sorry for cursing you!"

"Now to business."

Paper, pens and ink appeared in a trice; and a receipt in full was given by the colonel to Master Benjamin for all moneys or other goods owing by him to Colonel Warburton. And next he gave the written order for the bearer to search his apartments; then his keys.

"And now, and per—," the negro held up his black finger warningly, and the colonel continued—"perhaps you'll get us some drink, as you must keep us here some time longer."

Without replying, the three victors glided from the cellar, leaving the colonel half bound, but the three other soldiers manacled and fettered by the cords as they had been.

Meantime, and much about the same hour another prison,

somewhat similar in certain respects to the cellar, yet unlike in others, was the theatre of a conversational drama, which is closely connected with our story.

To an extensive subterranean apartment Hubert Santley found himself borne, when, on going out with the old woman who enquired for him at Castleporter, he found himself suddenly seized and a handkerchief thrown over his face, rendering him not only helpless but senseless. On coming to himself he recognised several of Henry Donaldson's men, and conjectured truly, as he soon learned, that they were his captors. It was not for some hours that Donaldson himself appeared.

"So, Donaldson," Hubert tauntingly exclaimed; "this is the return you make for favours!"

"Now, Santley, hear me, before you condemn me. When I was asked to undertake the seizure and imprisonment of an individual, I and my men here were almost out of funds; we have a rule amongst us never to miss a good chance of getting cash in such a case; but more, until I had the five hundred pounds in my possession, I didn't know that you were the man to be seized. I tell you honestly had I known you were the object, I'd have risked everything sooner than have lent a hand against you. Knowing so much you cannot hesitate to forgive me? But there is more. Since you came here, I was speaking to one of my employers, telling him of my success; and strange to say, Santley, but true, so help me, Heaven, I found him your best friend. He is now your other enemy's enemy, his mind is become so swayed towards you. And what will surprise you still more is, that not only this new friend of yours, but several of your oldest and truest, advise you to remain here a willing prisoner, for a few days at least, perhaps for two or three weeks!"

"My oldest and truest friends advising me to remain here a willing captive for two or three weeks!" wonderingly repeated Hubert; "I can't understand it—can you explain it?"

"In the first place, won't you like to know your enemies? They were Colonel Warburton and Master Benjamin Edwards. These are the two who employed me and paid me. Master Benjamin is now your friend, and one of the most dangerous enemies the colonel ever had."

Donaldson then proceeded to relate to his astonished auditor the many implications in which he—Hubert—was interwoven. How the colonel had engulfed Master Benjamin into the fatal load of debt; how the latter learned from the colonel the reason of such entrapping, and in consequence vowed revenge; then of the exertions and arrangements to get the debts paid, but of the obstacle Master Benjamin's false position in Sir Alexander Edwards's house presented; then of Master Benjamin's discoveries in the Clinker's room and from Joshua Percy; then of Ned McCool's offering to advance Master Ben the money, and so clear him of the debts and relieve himself—Hubert—at the same time; and finally that Colonel Warburton was in a dangerously losing position from an attempt to rob Castleporter; and the robber concluded by narrating the conversation between himself, Master Benjamin Edwards, and Ned McCool, in Rosedale a short time earlier that same morning.

"But why can't I get free?" impatiently demanded Hubert.

"When making their arrangements with me," replied Donaldson, "Colonel Warburton stipulated that either he or his companion should have free access to you at any time: we have since had reason to suppose that the colonel made this agreement that he might kidnap you out of the country entirely, provided he once got possession of Rosedale estates. Well then, go free now if you like; but if you do, may some less scrupulous person not be bought to treat you to an ounce of lead instead of a week's imprisonment? Be content, man, and take your friends' advice."

"'Tis a hard thing to want freedom," muttered Hubert.

"But beneficial imprisonment is necessary, and should not, therefore, be irksome," objected the other.

"Imprisonment is never sweet to Irishmen, Donaldson," retorted Hubert. "But if freedom brings death, why doubt in choosing?"

Much more argumentative conversation ensued, which resulted in Hubert's deciding to remain in covert till the return of Huxley's messenger from England settled the question of the rightful heir to Sir Alexander Edwards. Yet not without much fear and misgiving, did Hubert consent to this arrangement. Sudden conversations like Master Benjamin's, he argued, were not always to be depended on; and then, should the final result of the investigation anent his heirship to Rosedale end unfavourably, might not his absence previously cause estrangement in certain quarters? Might not Sir Alexander force or coax Sir James into the proposed alliance, and where was he, where were his hopes, then? Master Benjamin, he knew, loved Annie Darcus with all the fierceness and timid strength of his anomalous nature, might he not, therefore, try to gain her, notwithstanding his apparent repentance?

"It wouldn't take either a seer or a saint to tell your thoughts now, Santley," Donaldson said, interrupting Hubert in his meditation.

"What are they then?" asked he.

"Why you think your chances of gaining the hand of Miss Darcus are lessened by your detention here; and you fear that Master Benjamin's repentance is only superficial. Amn't I right?"

"If I said no, you wouldn't believe me, I suppose; and you can't expect me to say yes. But why didn't Ned or Edwards come with you?" Hubert asked, his fears again gaining predominance.

"Ned told me," explained Donaldson, "that he had very important business which he couldn't omit at Castleporter; and Master Benjamin Edwards was waiting to see Sir Alexander to ask him for money to pay his debts——"

"But you told me Ned had promised to advance the money!" interrupted Hubert.

"On the supposition that Sir Alexander would not do so, or on that condition," explained Donaldson.

"Hem! But you haven't told me either where I'm confined," said Hubert, wondering more and more at every new phase that turned up, still unwilling to slide into satisfied contentment, yet disinclined to continue disagreeable or dissatisfied.

"Have you no idea?" queried the robber, smiling.

"Not the remotest."

"And yet you know the place well by report. We are now chatting in Croghry Cave, about twenty perches, horizontally, from the 'Tinker's Rock,' that you know so well."

"Can't be," argued Hubert, most dogmatically; "but where's the good in my saying that, when so many other wonderful things have turned up lately?"

"And yet it's true, Master Incredulous! And the only request I or my men make of you, is that you never, by word or deed, betray us; or expose the exact spot of ingress and egress. Colonel Warburton, or Master Benjamin either, will never enter here, except blindfolded; but you and Ned McCool we will trust. Won't me, men?" he demanded, turning suddenly to his men, who unanimously shouted an affirmation:

"And I pledge my solemn word for Ned and myself not to betray your confidence. Mayn't I have access here now and again should I think it advisable for your safety or my own to visit you some time?"

"Agreed," responded the band in concert.

"Now men, let breakfast come along, and then I'll show our friend the wenders of Croghry Cave."

CHAPTER XIX.

Sir Alexander Edwards, on leaving Castleporter, did not ride direct to Rosedale; on the contrary, he passed on to Heather Hall, where he and Sir James held a long but unsatisfactory conversation, the result of which was that Sir James would think over things and give his answer on the following morning to his brother baronet, who was to ride over from Rosedale.

The following morning arrived, and with it came Sir Alexander by appointment. So the two plotters sat down in the library.

Sir James abruptly expressed his doubts and fears on the intended union, proceeding to assign reasons founded on the discovery of the manuscripts and the consequent fact of Master Benjamin's pauperism if not illegitimacy.

"But, my dear Darcus," Sir Alexander argued; "why will you persist in placing any importance on this trumped-up, ridiculous story; for a more mysterious, absurd rigmarole I never heard of!"

"Yet suppose this mysterious, absurd rigmarole, as you term it," mimickingly retorted Sir James; "eventually results in truth,—what a happy existence would my daughter be engulfed in?"

"Let us examine the story calmly, Darcus," replied the baronet, who, though cowardly with some, overbearing with others, or fawning with a third party, was ever wily with Sir James Darcus, whose choleric, hasty temper was ever over-matched by the calculating coolness of Sir Alexander, who was, on the present occasion, bringing all his powers into play to win

his plans to success;—"I must admit," he reasoned with great apparent sincerity, "that I had at first some doubts regarding Ben when that widow's story was partly read; but when I considered Mrs. Santley's incontestable evidence,—and you must admit it to be more trustworthy than any freak of the fancy you can picture,—I saw immediately that the mark on young Santley's neck entirely set his claims aside. No, no, Sir James, let us carry out the intentions discussed at the hunt, and I have no fear we shall, either of us, regret ever having made Ben your son-in-law."

"I yield this much, Edwards," Sir James began, after a pause, which he had employed in weighing chances; "go you to London as pledged, go as speedily as possible, and return at the same rate. At your return, if you succeed in your expectations, and should nothing definite be discovered during your absence, I shall oppose the marriage no longer."

"Yet should Miss Darcus still dislike the union?" further queried Sir Alexander.

"Let her yield her dislikes or her fancies to my will!" exclaimed the father, now exasperated to a feeling of defiance by the constant harpings of Sir Alexander.

This is a strange, but nevertheless, a true feature in human nature. A man is requested to yield to a certain proposition; he refuses; the question is pressed; he refuses still, and more firmly; he is pressed still closer; he refuses more firmly, but now shows a little excitement; the pressure bears heavier on him; his refusal grows sterner and more excited; cool reasoning attacks him; he gets maddened then; and the result is, that to get rid of his persistent enemy or his tiresome friend as the case is, he, irritated beyond the endurance of his irascible temperament, throws up his opposition in a sudden burst of angry concession, and consoles himself with the fallacious argument that he doesn't care, or he couldn't avoid it, or it doesn't signify a whit, or some other such imbecile consolation! Strange infatuation!

That a man is so much in love with his ease or comfort, mental or physical, as to subside into a disagreeable admission, simply because he dislikes using the exertion necessary for refutation!

Thus it was with Sir James; he was too fond of his own comfort to continue his wise and honest opposition to Sir Alexander's arguments; too tired of this unending teasing; too irritable to remain cool under the constant satires; and therefore he unwisely yielded; cruelly consented to consign his daughter, his only child, to a life of misery. He was not entirely hardened, though; not totally heartless; for he eagerly caught at the only means of escape his mind formed, the fact that Master Ben should demand in *propria persona* the hand of his daughter!

"We are to remember, Edwards," he reminded the other; "that Ben must formally demand Annie's hand from herself as well as from me."

"And you may depend he shan't fail in so doing," replied Sir Alexander; "for I am happy to tell you that Ben will be a different man henceforward from what he has been."

"How so, Edwards?"

"I was wishing you present this morning, Darcus, when he made a willing confession of certain disreputable transactions of his during these past few years, between himself and Colonel Warburton, which have resulted in a debt of several thousands. The colonel insulted Ben yesterday evening, and there is now enmity between them. He wouldn't explain the insult to me, then, he said, but would at another time. His chief object in coming to me was to ask if I'd relieve him of his debts to the colonel. I never beheld a man so thoroughly repentant!"

"A debt of several thousands!" ejaculated Sir James with dismay on every feature and alarm in every tone; "you have deceived me, Edwards!" he excitedly continued, as he rose, and violently stamped through the room; "you have inveigled me into consenting to this union before letting that secret out! That

was a vulpine act! It oughtn't to have been done!"

Sir Alexander waited in silence till the other's irascibility cooled somewhat, when, ironically, slowly, and pithily, he rejoined:

"It is a secret to Ben that the father of the lady he seeks is in debt thrice as much as himself."

Sir James paled to death, then reddened to crimson, shook as if agued, and murmured: "I forgot, Edwards! Thank you for the reminder!" and immediately added; "But how in the name of Bacchus and Ceres did he get ingulphed to that amount?"

"By the most treacherous but most successful of means, Ben tells me. The colonel led him into drinking, betting, gambling, and the other usual excesses of dissipated gentlemen. Even with any fair play at all, Ben was safe enough; but the other forced the loans on him, spurring him on by exciting his feelings of pride, and ever showing him the meanness of a baronet's expectant heir to seem parsimonious or niggardly, or not fill his station properly or with sufficient splendour; and pooh-poohing Ben's attempts to settle or refuse."

"The villain! And is that the character of the man with whom we have been associating these few years past!" exclaimed Sir James; "by Heaven, Edwards, after such an exposure we need not wonder that the feelings of these poor unfortunate Irish burst forth sometimes, when they are trampled on by such villains as Warburton is!" the speaker paused; then continued: "After all, the wonder is, not that they kick at all, but that they don't kick a thousand times oftener. Let us be candid, Edwards; and in our confidential moments we must confess that they too frequently get cause for their disturbances. How do we feel when fooled and mocked by that serpent? And how must they feel, when constantly fooled by thousands of Warburtons; and not for one or two or five years, but for as many centuries! Ill as it suits us, Englishmen and Scotchmen as we are, to confess it, we must acknowledge that our reins are held too tightly at

times; nor is it a matter of astonishment that we should often have to be on our guard; often be so cautious, imaginary, or watchful, as to mistake a few pitchfork shafts for a bundle of pikes, and a drunken carpenter for an attacking legion of Irish Ribbonmen! Ha! ha! ha! Sir Alexander, I have you on the hip there!"

Strange as Sir James's admissions may sound, or improbable as it might seem for them to come from him, the present writer has, more than once, heard similar avowals uttered by gentlemen like our choleric baronet. Nor is it to be wondered at. While, under friendship or even friendly acquaintance, we laud the virtues of our associates or praise their principles, even though we be warned that we are mistaken and even it be proved incontestably that we are, yet let us suffer in our own selves, and our slander and enmity are the stronger in proportion as were our friendship and association beforehand. Favours given are doubly valued, and sufferings returned are equally estimated. Our friends, Sir James and Sir Alexander, felt more keenly, the former especially, the hardships the Irish peasant too often endured while they were, themselves, smarting under the insults offered by Colonel Warburton. "Do unto others as you would that others should do unto you," is a great precept the superiors in position of Ireland's peasantry never apply to themselves; it was never made for them. But, "Do unto others as you wish, and let others do unto you only as you wish"—that is the doctrine for them; that is, too often, not always, the motto on their standard; the principle which fundamentals the conduct and acts of too many of the magistrates, landlords, or other such rulers of Ireland. Would to Heaven that it were otherwise; that a wise law of justice and equality existed for all alike; and that every man had the faith and the hope that he would receive the punishments or rewards his crimes or his virtues might deserve. Would that such were so; then, indeed, would our beautiful, our so beautiful, land be no longer the unfortunate land she is, be no more the prey of internal dissatisfaction, external treachery, or—worst, most destructive, most deadly, and most permanent

and ineradicable of all—religious animosity. Heaven be thanked, though; many of the causes of Irishmen's discontent are fast being removed, some even as I write; others have passed away; and it should be the fervent hope of all Erin's friends, as it should be also their unremitting labour, to make her peaceful and happy, wealthy and prosperous, free from trouble, disaffection or tyranny.

"You have the laugh on your side, Darcus," replied Sir Alexander, when he had recovered from the hit; "but I have the benefit on mine, and I prefer it. They may laugh that win, Darcus; and I expect I'll be the winner when you and I can sit down to dinner as Baron Darcus and Baron Rosedale. What a power our united families and names will have in the country then! Baron Darcus! Baron Rosedale! They sound well, Darcus, don't they?"

"I often intended to ask you, Edwards, how it is that you rely with so much certainty on getting these titles. You're not famous in war, nor in law, nor in politics, nor in learning, that you should be so certain! How is it then?" questioned Sir James, not noticing his companion's previous query.

"As we are in a candid confidential mood this morning, Darcus," replied Sir Alexander, "I do not object telling you. But yet you surprise me to think that it needs any great talents to gain the entrance to a peerage! Why, many of our highest nobility gained their titles from some immodest courtesan or court mistress, and gain their incomes from properties bestowed for the silly smiles of a Villiers or a Querouailles. Witness the Graftons and the Richmonds. But to our own case. Many years ago, an aunt of mine was nurse in the Royal Family, and was on terms of moderately close intimacy with the reigning monarch. Now, it is too well known, Darcus, to attempt to hide it, that many of the members in our reigning line have never been too virtuous; indeed they have become proverbial as being the opposite. Without any intention on my aunt's part, she became privy to an act of the young heir, which would have

been ruinous to him to make public. He was already sufficiently notorious, and feared that this last escapade, if known, would rouse the people so as to prevent his ever gaining the sceptre. My aunt was the only individual whom the prince feared; and therefore he wrote and came to her, pledging his princely word to favour her or her relations in any possible method he ever could, provided she kept silent. My aunt would never have exposed the prince, in any case, so she cheerfully gave the required promise. The queen had great affection for my aunt, and got the king to make her a present of Rosedale property which had just fallen into his hands, together with a baronetcy for my father. And soon after, through the queen also, my aunt,—but she gave all to my father—got presents of land in several other counties of Ireland. One of them was a bishopric; this one and two others have rectors' livings attached; and the only remuneration the king required for all was a pair of gloves every year to him or his heirs for ever. Here then, Sir James, are three things, the friendship of the queen, the interest of the Prince of Wales, and my own personal influence at court,—can you doubt then, of my ability to gain the titles I have promised to obtain for us? 'Tis an old adage, Darcus, but true as old, that 'Tis a bad wind that blows nobody good'—had it not been for the bad proclivities of our princes, my family never would have had a knight among them; for, after all, I understand that the prince's interference benefited us as much as the Queen's did."

"So that's your story, Edwards!" quietly commented Sir James; "Yes, I must regret, as must all supporters of monarchy, that our English race of royalty is not more reserve, more guarded in their conduct. There is vast room for improvement—let us hope it may soon come."

At this moment, Master Benjamin Edwards, Henry Donaldson, and Ned McCool were announced!

With how many and how various grades of society do the exigencies of mixing much in the public affairs of the world

bring people into contact? Here is a robber chief associating with a gentleman as far as wealth, position, and a collegiate education are concerned; and both on a footing of equality with one whom but yesterday they considered a peasant, a mere slave, an ignorant rustic clown, but whom the good fortune of a legacy elevated into an equal, wealth considered, and who was certainly superior to both as far as mental qualifications and true moral education would be accounted necessary to form the real gentleman. A real gentleman is one of Nature's noblest works.

That Master Benjamin would intrude so unceremoniously on the baronets, they did not wonder at; nor was Ned McCool's entrance a matter of great surprise to them either, considering his recent elevation; but that Henry Donaldson, the outlaw, the robber, the midnight thief, the murderer, the notorious leader of his notorious plunderers; that he—he—he—should dare to enter the sacred presence of Sir James Darcus and Sir Alexander Edwards,—and within the sacred precincts of Heather Hall, too!—that was a deed too insufferable to be endured, too bold to go unpunished!

That the three new comers believed that the appearance in that apartment of one of them would be both disagreeable to the baronets and dangerous to the individual himself was evident from the situations they individually chose, not without prearrangement either, was certain from their uniform motions. Ned moved forward and stood before the bell-cord; Master Benjamin stood in the door-way, so that no one could open the door or pass out or in while he retained that position; and Donaldson stood facing them all, his back close to a large window, which, they must all have known opened on hinges, giving free access to the grounds without.

Sir James strode to the bell-pull, but his hand was quietly but firmly put aside by Ned; at the window he encountered Donaldson, who prevented his egress there; and he saw the door held by Master Benjamin; thus actually keeping him what he im-

patiently demanded was he; "Am I a prisoner in my own house?"

It seemed to be understood among the three just arrived that Master Benjamin should act as spokesman, which he accordingly did.

"You, Sir James, and you, father, will listen and understand that if any blame attaches to any of us it must be attached to me. Let me explain the cause of this intrusion; until you hear it, suspend your otherwise premature judgment. You, Sir James, have been probably hearing this morning of my delinquencies and my debts. My father perhaps informed you that I have resolved to change my mode of life, and of my requesting him to advance money for me to pay my debts. I am now happy to be able to inform you and my father both, Sir James, that I am not now due Colonel Warburton any, even the most trifling sum of the large amount I owed him about two hours since. My friend here, Ned McCool, was the means of conveying to me this pleasant information a few minutes ago; for the relief he gave me, I owe him a million impulses of gratitude, and my life henceforth will prove my thanks."

The baronets turned their gaze of wonderment and inquisitive curiosity on Ned, whose turn it was to speak now.

"What I can tell, gentlemen, I understood this morning myself from that African who has been noticed moving around here this time back. It seems that he was over at the wake at Castle-porter last night, and was rambling about through the grounds when he noticed some suspicious looking figures approaching the dwelling-house. It also seems that this negro had some comrades with him, and they agreed to track the other party, and watch them. Their attention was next drawn, it would seem, to a light in the library, and by some means or other, they managed to seize four men who were all closely masked. They then tied them, thinking them to be a party of Donaldson's band here, and searched them. A copy of Miss Porter's will, all except the portion of it relating to leaving her property to her

affianced husband, was found on one of them. Pulling the masks off the robbers, the negro and his companions found, not the faces of any of the robbers they blamed, but the well-known countenances of Colonel Warburton, his junior lieutenant, Lieutenant Snatchley, and two other soldiers! It seems also, from the negro's story, that the colonel had been caught not long before in some other equally disgraceful act by this same negro and his companions; and so, as punishment for the two misdemeanours, the colonel got his choice of four alternatives. He must have considered it the easiest of the four to give a receipt in full for all Master Benjamin's debts, and to give up all the papers he held regarding them; for he did so; and thus it happens that my friend here"—pointing to Master Benjamin—"is to-day not due him a rap. And besides; the negro, who seems to have a facility for making discoveries, learned also that the colonel had something to do with the disappearance of my friend, Hubert Santley, who has been missing since some time last night; and is resolved, he tells me, to retain the colonel and his men in bondage till Hubert's place of hiding is known or himself found out, living or dead. It was searching for Hubert I was last night, Sir Alexander, when I disturbed you; for it was to me you spoke when you put your head out of the window some time before Master Benjamin here came home."

"But what has all this in connexion with Sir Alexander or myself?" exclaimed Sir James, in his usually passionate manner; "It doesn't at all explain why you obtruded yourselves upon the private conversation my friend and I were having! How did you reason that I was so interested in your discoveries and robberies and imprisonments?"

"How couldn't we reason so, Sir James!" ejaculated Ned, in reply; "we knew that human nature couldn't but be interested where a man would hear of his intended son-in-law's well-being! We hurried to tell the two people we thought would best wish to hear of such acts as have occurred inside the last twenty-four hours, keeping from the persons concerned."

"But this man—Donaldson—this ro——, why has he dared to come here?" demanded the still offended Sir James.

Donaldson himself replied :

"It has fallen to my lot to know the secret place in which Mr. Santley has been immured by the joint order of Colonel Warburton and another gentleman, whose name shall now be nameless. And for certain reasons which cannot be made public yet awhile, it has been determined, and I think wisely too, that Mr. Santley shall remain in bondage for some days yet to come. This, doubtless, seems strange to you; but if ye knew the reasons that operate to detain Mr. Santley ye would, I assert, agree that his detention is a wise act."

"These persons, Sir James, seem to think that we must be as anxious to have our fingers in the pie as they are," haughtily said Sir Alexander, addressing his brother baronet, and eschewing the presence of third parties entirely; "what business have these two men,"—and the speaker indicated Ned and Donaldson—"with us, I would like to know?"

"Father!" exclaimed Master Benjamin; "when I told you that I it was who brought these men here, you might have been satisfied that I had good reasons for so doing. Some people, Sir James, take one way of doing their business; others would take a different course; in fact, there may be as many ways of asking a favour as there are people in the world to ask favours of. For me, I was always odd; few who associated with Master Benjamin Edwards ever found him cowardly or niggardly; and they were as few who ever parted from him without admitting him odd or peculiar. In his own odd way, therefore, you are asked, according to a contract between you and Sir Alexander, for the hand of your daughter for Master Benjamin Edwards; with all his faults, virtues, or eccentricities, he will endeavour to make Miss Darcus happy, and be a good husband to her. To be witnesses of the demand was one reason why my companions here entered this room to-day with me. Your answer, Sir James?"

"In the same spirit of eccentricity, Ben," answered Sir James, "I renew my consent, given a few minutes before you came in, to your father, that my daughter becomes the bride of Master Benjamin Edwards, at the time your father and I shall arrange. That's it, Sir Alexander?"

Sir Alexander nodded assent. Master Benjamin continued:

"Having arrived at so much of an amicable arrangement on that point, another reason must be given for our intrusion; and on this point he,"—nodding to Donaldson,—“has something to say, something neither Ned nor I have ever heard.”

The robber paused for a few seconds as if to recall the events he was about to narrate, and then proceeded:

CHAPTER XX.

"About thirty years ago," began Donaldson, "there lived in one of the northern Irish counties, which of them is not material, and in a somewhat remote district of the county, a family, whose youngest son at the time was in his twentieth year. No, I'm wrong in saying thirty years since; I should have said twenty-eight. This young man's family were respectable, but not above the farming class, and his associates were of the same grade. Among the neighbours was a widow woman with an only daughter. Gentlemen, I tell you the daughter was not only good but handsome; she was as fresh as the lark and as lively; and as blithe and free as she was bonnie. I have seen Miss Darcus, Sir James, and she is beautiful and blithe; and I have seen Miss Ellen O'Bonan, Sir Alexander, before you made her Lady Edwards, but I have never seen anyone so purely modest, whose hair was so golden glossy, whose smile was so joyous a sunshine, whose cheek was so peachly soft, whose voice was so musically ringing, as that widow woman's only daughter, the gentle, unassuming Rosa Lipsett. She was eighteen. She had many suitors, but her choice fell on the young man above mentioned. And I tell you he was not unworthy of her choice. There were few in the district could run, leap, or fence with him; few who could surpass him either on the field or the platform, for he had been given a good education; he was sober, steady, and honest. He was to make the young woman his bride, and she had vowed to be his; but they were to wait for three years, and were to work hard to have enough for a good start in the world when they'd get married. How truly those two loved other! how entirely they trusted! how sweetly their faith was

exchanged! From childhood they had been lovers. They seemed born for each other. They hoped to live so, and hoped to die so. One lovely summer evening in the beginning of September, they sat and talked over their united future; they arranged where and how to live; they confessed for the thousandth time their feelings for each other. Into the long hours of the warm night they sat and chatted; and even when they parted, it was only to meet again in the same spot the following evening. And they met again the next evening, gentlemen; yes, they met, Rosa Lipsett and her betrothed; but she could not utter her usual sweet words of welcome; she was a corpse! Her eyes, her dear blue eyes, were closed in death! Her lips were mute; she was dead! Dead, dead, stiff and cold; murdered in cold blood; shot down by hot blood in the full light of day!"

The robber paused and turned his back on his auditors, gazing seemingly on the grounds a little before continuing; and when he did so, his voice was husky and nervous.

"As I have said, gentlemen, she was murdered. It happened that, half a mile about from her mother's house, there lived a family in the habit of carrying on illicit stilling. Their girl, Mary, had often been coaxing Rosa to accompany her to see the fun at the still-house; but dear good Rosa would never consent. Tired out by constantly refusing her comrade she consented to go the day after the long chat with her lover. She had never been in such a place before, and told them they'd never find her there again. One of the scouts came running in shouting that the soldiers were coming. This made the stillers start. Rosa didn't know the danger, and when one of the men begged her to catch the worm and run down with it to her mother's, she started off with it for dear life. The gauger spied her running and followed her. She ran and was beating him when he pulled out a pistol, cocked it, fired, and poor Rosa fell, never to speak again. Her mother's cottage was near, and the mother ran out when she heard the shot; but she found her daughter, her only daughter dead before her. She fell on her

knees, and in her passion and sorrow, she cursed the murderer, his seed, breed, and generation; and the murderer of gentle Rosa Lipsett has that widow's curse hanging on him!"

Again the robber paused, again turned to the window, and as before, continued, his voice rough and quivering.

"Rosa Lipsett's betrothed lover, gentlemen, shed tears over her grave and her untimely end; for days and nights, ay, for weeks and months; but then his nature lost its humanity; he became sullen, morose, careless; vowed to be an avenger on the murderer of his lost love; and finally left home and friends to join a different life, where danger and excitement might make him forget his loss! That young man, gentlemen, became an outlaw robber, a robber chief; he is the man now addressing you; he is the man ye know as Donaldson the robber!"

This unexpected announcement took his auditors so much by surprise that none of them uttered a syllable, none of them moved, none of them but felt himself affected despite of himself by Donaldson's history. It was more than a minute,—and a minute's such silence seems long—'ere the robber again broke the hushed suspense.

"A little more explanation, and I'll have finished. The young ganger who shot down my darling Rosa, gentlemen, is the soulless villain who broke Miss Porter's heart, the dangerous scoundrel who attempted to abduct another lady the night before last; it is he who led Master Benjamin there to destruction; who robbed Castleporter last night; it is the deep rascal, the double-dyed, scheming, lying vagabond, Colonel Ronald Warburton, now lying in bondage; he was the murderer of my lost Rosa; he is the man made me what I am—Donaldson the robber! God! that he were here now!"

Had he been he would never have left Heather Hall alive. Donaldson was mad. He could have annihilated the man who had made his life a blank; and he would have done so. Better, far better for Colonel Warburton that he was lying, bound, in

Castleporter cellars, than free, to be in Donaldson's power in his then excited mood.

"Great Heaven! do you mean to aver that that monster, that villain, that viper, that serpent, that demon, who insinuated himself into our confidences, and would have been my son-in-law but for my pledged word to another; that he was guilty of all these misdeeds, and yet permitted to encumber the earth?" exclaimed Sir James Darcus, in a very fury of maddest excitability.

"Yes, Sir James, I am telling the truth, I swear, as I hope for salvation. You feel the insult severely, and your heart prompts you towards revenge or retaliation; judge, then, of my feelings, and of the feelings of those tried similarly, or worse;—for I swear, in the name of all that is holy, that I would rather see her I loved so well, my gentle Rosa, dead, than see her the illicit sport of a libertine or inhuman villain like Warburton. Revenge is after him, however, gentlemen. Rosa's mother's curse has already operated; for only a week or better has passed,—indeed the scene occurred that big stormy night!—since his uncle and family were burned to cinders, with their ancient family residence and all it contained, except the servants, all of whom were saved, though the members of the family were every one burned! What punishment can you decree fit for such a man! His days of disgrace and misery are only beginning, for I swear to pursue him to justice to the uttermost corners of the earth; and I do not think I am exceeding the limits of a just retribution! I am powerless to bring him under the law; but I'll give him law myself, simply and solely, because I can't appear in a court of justice against him." Poor Donaldson; his anger, love of revenge, was irreligious.

"He shall never dare to enter society again in this district," expressed Sir James, determination ringing in every tone of his voice.

"If he so dare," added Sir Alexander; "we must consider it

incumbent on us, Sir James, to expose his villainies to all, lest some might risk suffering from him again."

"I concluded, from some expressions the negro used," interposed Ned, "that Colonel Warburton will not try to remain on in Moneyfin after his adventures of the last thirty or forty hours. To risk exposure publicly before all his former associates, would be more, the negro thinks, than even the colonel, brazen as he undoubtedly is, dare to endure. We may take it for granted then," continued the speaker; "that he will soon leave the country. The only thing we have to fear would be his acts during the few days he might remain around here. I have an undoubted belief that he and his servant will not leave Ireland without causing, if in their power by any means, calamities to befall those who have so cleverly checkmated their rascalities and their machinations. This is my firm conviction. I, for one, am resolved to have a constant and close watch set, as soon as I understand he gets free."

"Then better not free him at all," suggested Sir Alexander; "why not keep him bound, put him on board a ship, and send him off to England out of the way at once?"

"And what reason would you assign to the authorities for such waylaying and transporting of one of His Majesty's colonels in the army; for all the stories that we know of him, true though they are, couldn't be given in evidence? It wouldn't do, I fear, Sir Alexander. Better leave it among Master Benjamin, Donaldson, and myself, and my life on the result but Colonel Warburton gets the worst of the battle before we part with him! Won't he?" and Ned thus questioned his two companions as he concluded. They nodded meaningly.

So it was arranged.

Before parting, the robber again addressed the baronets.

"It was principally for the purpose of informing you, gentlemen, in your magisterial capacity, of Colonel Warburton's life and acts as I have done, that made me accompany Master Benjamin and Ned here to-day. And in such a capacity I wish you

to remember my relation, so that, should you be suddenly called on for assistance, there may be no delay in procuring such assistance in a legal, regular way. Good morning, Sir Alexander—Good morning, Sir James."

Once in the avenue, Donaldson hurriedly addressed his two companions:—"You know where to find me—be forward sharp at twelve," and disappeared instantaneously from the curious, dangerous eyes of Sir James and his brother baronet, who kept watching the trio as they moved away.

The robber had barely vanished when Miss Darcus approached from the lawn and shook hands warmly with Ned, and also, though more coldly, with Master Benjamin.

"There are two ways in which I might put you at your ease, Miss Darcus," Master Benjamin abruptly commenced; "one is, to withdraw myself and leave my friend here"—the lady stared in amazement at the speaker when he applied the term "friend" to Ned; "you stare, Miss Darcus, but he is my friend—are you not, Ned? I thought so. Well then. I might withdraw, and leave him to make the necessary explanations, which he was about to return to do; or I might remain on and support him in his story, after first telling you that I give up all pretensions, now and forever, to your hand, as long as your heart is not mine, as long as you love another. Which shall I do, Miss Darcus?"

"An interested person can very rarely give unbiassed judgment, Master Benjamin," evasively replied the lady; "and as I am in that position, I beg to be excused from deciding. I will agree to Ned's opinion, however!" and her gaze of interrogation to our hero, caused him to reply: "Remain, Master Benjamin; remain, by all means." The person addressed only bowed; when, the constraint of her difficult position regarding him being removed, she put the question to Ned.

"You have found him out, Ned; have you not?"

There was no name mentioned in her enquiry, but Ned had no difficulty in knowing to whom she referred. Had Hubert seen the anxious expression, the wistfulness, the hope, the love, the entreaty, that beamed in varied tracery on Annie's expressive countenance, as she made the enquiry, he must have felt the darkest prison a sunshine of glory, the dreariest cave a world of happiness.

"Oh, yes, we have found him out, Miss Darcus. He is well, and is a willing prisoner, his great anxiety being lest you be too uneasy about him, when you find that he's going to be absent for some weeks—two or three, maybe."

"Have you seen him?"

"Not yet, but I am going to see him with Master Benjamin here, at twelve o'clock." And Ned then proceeded to explain to the lady the circumstances within his knowledge which had occurred previous to the present conversation, but succeeding the meeting with her, that morning early. More and more Miss Darcus wondered, but she cheerfully gave in her adhesion to a plan proposed by Ned and supported by Master Benjamin, by which it was intended to surprise Sir James and Sir Alexander, and make her the bride of Hubert Santley, whether Master Benjamin Edwards remained Master Benjamin Edwards or became removed to a different grade or position.

"But does Master Benjamin not object to all this arrangement, Ned?" was Annie's wondering interrogation, which was replied to by the individual in question himself.

"I not only don't object, but will further it in every possible way. Ned may tell you that the plan originated with me. I'll feel happy in seeing you the bride of him you have chosen; and should the expected discovery prove fatal to my present position, your bridal moment will be my farewell one."

"I know a friend of mine and Hubert's," said Miss Darcus, after a little pause, "that I would like could get a bride for himself at the same time as Hubert does!"

"I wonder who that can be, Miss Darcus?" queried Ned, quite innocently.

"Wouldn't it be quite romance-like, Ned, if the foster-brothers, that got along so famously these two days past, should get married at the same time? But tell me, Ned; when you were talking this morning, you mentioned of widow Mason going to Mrs. Santley, and how she said she had taken her child home to nurse, and was so sure of him by the mark on his neck. Now, how can you and Hubert be foster-brothers, as it is always said you are, and Hubert nursed by his own mother?"

"Mrs. Santley certainly did take her child from Mrs. Ramsay; but that was because she didn't like that nurse. My mother was very intimate with Mrs. Santley, and when she took Hubert home, telling Mrs. Ramsay that she was better of her sickness, she only wanted to let my mother nurse Hubert, and so she did; and so you see after all that Hubert and Ned are foster-brothers, Miss Darcus; and I think I may say that the man who injures either makes two enemies instead of one, as Colonel Warburton has found to his cost!"

In a few minutes after this, Ned and Master Benjamin parted from Miss Darcus and took the direction of Croghry Hill. In less than an hour they reached the brow of the hill, and, soon finding themselves passing the "Tinker's Rock," they threw themselves down by the side of the large stone fence mentioned by Henry Donaldson in his conversation with Colonel Warburton and Master Benjamin the previous evening. Ned began to whistle as if calling a dog from a good distance; now and then he paused; and in one of the pauses a voice was heard, "Come farther up the hill." Following the demand, Ned and his companion moved up about ten yards alongside the fence, and were then told, "Sit down on that big stone."

A strange thing then occurred. A smaller stone, which sat beside the large one, was pushed to one side, and a man's head appeared; it was one of the robbers. He directed Master Benjamin to come to him, and he then moved up into day, as the

other moved down. This was done so neatly, that men working in an adjoining field discerned no motion. A similar exchange was made with Ned by another robber; so that, where Master Benjamin and Ned had been sitting, two robbers were now chatting in friendly-like conversation.

Hubert, when he saw his foster-brother, and felt the grasp of his friendly hand, forgot that liberty,—that sweetest of earthly blessings—was not his; and Ned—why he felt that generous satisfaction and fraternal consolation which are generated by the finding of a lost, a cherished treasure.

Henry Donaldson was present; and Gallagher, and Jordan, and King, and others of equal fame; and there, too, was Johnstone.

"I'll not prevent your conversation long, gentlemen," began Henry Donaldson, addressing Master Benjamin and the foster-brothers; "for you must both be anxious to have one. But I abstained from showing our prisoner,"—here the speaker indicated Hubert—"the wonders of our covert here, till you,"—nodding to Ned and Master Benjamin—"would be present. So follow me, and I'll guide you through our palace;" and the robber smiled as he seized a light to cicerone his visitors through the cave.

The apartment our party occupied was about ten feet square. The walls were either of the solid mountain rock, or were of very solid masonry with cement of the same colour as the stone, which was evidently the material composing the cave itself. The roof seemed to have been once ceiled, but was now dangerously ornamented by the numerous stalactites which adorned it; and was the more dangerous from the lowness of the roof, which Ned touched easily with his fist. Following Donaldson, our friends found themselves compelled to creep through a narrow, descending aperture of no material length, fortunately; emerging from which they found themselves in an apartment similar to the one just left, but which was more ornamented, having a large roomy fire-place surrounded by a marble chimney-piece beautifully

carved and variegated. A few coals yet slumbered on the hearth.

"Surely you don't dare to light a fire here?" questioned Hubert.

"And why not?" demanded the robber, in a tone of surprise; "do you think we could live without a fire? We burn wood, as you see, but we burn it first in the night-time, when the smoke can't be seen, and then the coke slumbers away, making heat but no smoke. Then, besides, there are few people who care about prowling around this part of Croghry Hill during darkness, so that the smoke can't be smelt."

Another narrow passage like the last was then passed through, and another apartment similar to the last arrived at. The only difference between it and them was a curious looking aperture about three feet by two which darkened one of the corners.

"I have tried to enter there," said Donaldson; "but never could get far in. You meet steps, which keep descending and descending till you think you are in the very bowels of the earth. It was down that hole the old bagpipe player went long ago!"

"When was that? What was it?" asked Master Benjamin.

"Why you surely heard the story! It seems that a bagpiper got into this cave one time, and told his friends he'd explore it, and that they'd always know where he'd be, for that he'd keep playing away on his bagpipes. In he went, and in, and in; but he never came back; and the last tune he was heard playing was under St. Adamnan's bridge down there. And the people that heard the playing said they knew the tune well; it was, 'The farther in, the deeper.'"

A smile played around the corners of Donaldson's mouth as he finished relating the anecdote. Then, taking a stone from his pocket, he handed it to Hubert, saying, "Pitch that into the hole till you hear the echoing sound."

Hubert did so, and away went the pebble; away, away, away, far, far down and away came back the reverberations.

"We may return now," said Donaldson.

They returned to the apartment they had left; and then continued on through it, and through another narrow passage, and finally entered an apartment similar to the others. Donaldson drew the attention of his companions to another funnel, remarking: "That passage leads to the closed-up mouth of the cave. As we have none of us any intention of getting out there we may get back."

Returned to the original apartment, the leader ordered the dinner to be laid; "but first," said he; "let us have something to clear our throats after that musty, dusty, thirsty exploration."

Round went the joke and the laugh. "Here we are all alike, men," said the chief, addressing his own men and his visitors; "the best joke gets the longest laugh; and the heartiest laugh shows the best mind. Here's success to those who deserve it, poverty to the miser, gain to the honest, happiness for our friends, disgrace to our enemies, and Heaven for all! Come, let us have a cheer; watchmen are without."

"Now for a song, men," added the chief; "who'll give us a song? A man shouldn't be a bad fellow in his own house. I'll begin."

And springing to his feet, he put a pistol in his belt, and a knife; then casting his coat off him, and putting on a dainty cap with a feather and harp on the front of it, he seized a gun;—then, in full robber costume, and with a voice many might covet and none refuse, he sang the following verses:—

Oh, fast and free is our robber life,
And fast and free are we;
We fear no law and we fear no strife;
Oh, a robber's life for me!

Through hill and dale and valley and glen
We ramble far and free,
Or we burrow the miser's golden den,
So a robber life for me!

Oh, fast and free be our robber life,
And fast and free be we;
We fear no law and we fear no strife;
Oh, a robber's life for me!

We help the poor and we help the lame,
And the lonely and sick help we;
But the miser he fears our fearless name,
And—that's as it ought to be.
We ne'er shall take of the peasant's store,
He has little enough—has he;
But we levy our tax at the landlord's door:—
Oh, a robber life for me!

Then fast and free is our robber life,
And fast and free are we;
We fear no law and we fear no strife;
Oh, a robber life for me!

Then pledge in our cups of good poteen,
That a gauger ne'er did see;
While we care not for lords, nor king nor queen;
But rovers bold are we.
Then let us laugh and dance and sing,
For that's as it ought to be,
And to-morrow more gold to our cave we'll bring,
So a robber life for me!

Oh, fast and free is our robber life,
And fast and free be we;
We fear no law and we fear no strife;
Oh, a robber life for me!

As the singer sang out each chorus, all the band chimed in; and when he came to the last stanza, each man sprang to his feet, the glass of whiskey brimming full in his hand, and joined in the chorus. The cave echoed and re-echoed with the stentorian tones of the harmonious voices; and as the song ended, the chief sank on his seat again, simply adding: "That's the way we enjoy ourselves."

Many a time and many a year after, the three visitors remembered that song, and thrilled, as at the moment, with the thoughts of that visit.

CHAPTER XXI.

The remains of Miss Sophia Porter, the last of her race, were consigned to the family vault at Rosedale Church; and the emaciated body of old widow Mason was deposited in the lowlier graveyard of Moneyfin.

Ned McCool had taken possession of Miss Porter's legacy, and was living in Castleporter mansion; Miss Porter's old servant, Catherine Blake, being his housekeeper.

Mary Carlin had returned to her charge at home, and was attending to her usual duties.

Hubert Santley still remained imprisoned in Croghry Cave, visited often by his foster-brother.

Colonel Warburton, Lieutenant Snatchley, a corporal and a private, were still missing from Moneyfin, though the strictest search had been instituted to find them, living or dead; and a new colonel was in command of the detachments in Moneyfin barracks.

Sir James Darcus was waiting anxiously and restlessly for the return of Sir Alexander from London; and Annie Darcus heard regularly from Hubert.

Master Benjamin stalked quietly and silently about, rarely absent from about the barracks in Moneyfin, when he could with propriety be there; and when not there, he spent the greater portion of his time either with Hubert and Donaldson, or at Heather Hall, with whose young mistress he had latterly become quite intimate, to the great delight of Sir James.

No robberies had been committed about the neighbourhood

for some time past by Donaldson or his band; and the people were hence beginning to believe they had left the country;—you and I, however, dear readers, know better.

The Clinker was up and moving about, and was recovering rapidly, but was yet exempt from duty; he was intensely anxious for Percy's return and the colonel's discovery, and was intolerably overbearing towards his fellow-soldiers.

Thus were men and matters when, one evening, some two weeks after our scene in the cave, related in the end of the last chapter, a horseman rode up the avenue to Rosedale mansion, and enquired for Master Benjamin.

That gentleman soon appeared, and his ejaculation of, "Oh, Percy! Returned?" showed how vivid to his memory was his midnight interview with the Clinker's messenger; while the expressive beamings of his countenance denoted his satisfaction at the soldier's calling with him first, according to their arrangement, instead of going direct to the Clinker, as the latter commanded.

"Come in—come in. Percy, I believe your name is?"

"Yes, that's the name I am known by."

Neither of the speakers said any more till they were seated in Master Benjamin's private room, of which mention has been more than once made in this story; the tired soldier enjoying meat and drink—luxuries or necessities he seemed to have been stinted of for some days.

"I met a negro a little out of the town, Master Benjamin, and he told me that Colonel Warburton was from home, and that I was to come on direct to Rosedale to you with my answer."

"Quite right. I requested the darkey to keep a sharp lookout for you, and send you on to me. As we have a long chat before us, we needn't lose time. Have you any papers with you?"

"Yes, I have a bundle of them that cost the writer, Zedekiah Ramsay, almost six hours to write, and twice as many more to get sworn to before a magistrate, and caused me to miss coming the day I had intended. There they are."

Master Benjamin took the manuscripts and began to peruse them. Suddenly as he had just opened them, and before he had read a single word, he crumpled them up, and demanded, in a husky tone, of Percy: "Did you read these papers?"

"Not a syllable," answered the other.

"Do you know what they contain?"

"No more than the unborn child!"

"Do you not know what your errand was?"

"As much as Nebuchadnezzar does."

"You have no idea what the purport of these letters is?"

"Not an idea."

"If they were all in cinders would it have any effect on you?"

"Not the slightest that I know of."

"Would you try to prevent my burning them?"

"I wouldn't move either hand or foot to hinder you."

"I'll not burn them."

With this resolution, whatever his intention was in questioning Percy, Master Benjamin proceeded to master the contents of Ramsay's papers. Whatever these contained, they affected the reader extremely. Whether for him or against him, his countenance indexed varying mental feelings. Flushed and pale, alternately; stern and soft; bold and submissive; goodness and badness—these were the impulses that reflected themselves from his mind, that flitted across his troubled countenance. Even when he concluded the manuscript, hesitancy and doubt were

still visibly charactered on his features. By one of those super-human struggles that people can make only once or twice in a lifetime, he shook himself free from this veil of indecision, and addressed his companion, who had been gazing in wonderment at his ceaseless play of feature.

"I have been given to understand that Huxtle, otherwise known as the Clinker, has some hold on you, that binds you at the risk of a severe if not fatal punishment, to serve him, at no matter how great risk,—is that true, may I ask?"

"It is, unfortunately, too true, Master Benjamin," answered Percy, ruefully; "he holds my life in his hands. To save myself, for he brutally threatens to expose me if I disobey him, I must, for the sake of self-preservation, do his biddings. He promised often to free me, but always puts me off, so that I see nothing before me but a life of misery, or death by my own hand."

"Why not give the Clinker a sudden passage to the other world, and so free yourself at once?"

Percy shook his head negatively, but replied not.

"If you'd confide in me and tell me how he has trammelled you," added Master Benjamin, "perhaps I could use some interest in your favour, for I think I have some influence with Colonel Warburton."

The soldier delayed ere he answered.

"I'll trust you, Master Benjamin. Would you think by looking at me now that I am as highly born as yourself, Master Benjamin? Or that my family occupied as high a position as your own? And yet such is the case. I received a good education, but was too wild to profit by such a blessing. I turned wrong altogether; went wild, foolish, mad; and in my madness committed a crime. I enlisted then; and to amuse my leisure hours, I was tempted to write my biography. In that autobiography are confessions sufficient to hang me; and by some means or other, unknown to me, Huxtle got possession of it,

and holds it over me, threatening to produce it and bring me to punishment, if I attempt to disobey him."

"And if you had that paper in your possession, Huxtlely has no more power over you?" queried Master Benjamin.

"None; most emphatically none," replied Percy; "I could defy him and the world were that cursed biography destroyed."

"And if it were destroyed, what would your intention be? Would you remain on in the regiment?"

"No. I have saved money enough to buy my discharge, and would emigrate to France or Spain or America, where I could labour without any one knowing my past life, or casting my evil deeds in my face."

A silence fell over the speakers as Percy concluded, which was broken only by the crackling of the fire in the blazing hearth. Master Benjamin then rose, unlocked a little desk, took from it a roll of paper, walked silently across the apartment to where the soldier sat, and silently placed the paper in his hands, adding in a low tone: "See what that contains."

Percy quickly and tremblingly unfolded the paper, saw that it was his coveted autobiography in full, and thankfully exclaimed: "Lord of mercy and goodness, I thank Thee for this favour! A thousand times I thank Thee that I can breathe free once more. Thanks! Thanks! Tha-a-nks!"

As the poor fellow uttered the last words, his voice failed him, his senses forsook him; the deep joy he experienced overpowered him, and he sank, helpless as a babe, on the floor, his glassy orbs fixed on the last blackened remains of his paper as it crumpled and turned and twisted in the flames into which he had strength enough to pitch it, ere falling senselessly at his companion's feet. And so that paper perished, that paper that had made his life a hell, through the machinations of an earthly devil, Oliver Huxtlely.

At the very time that Joshua Percy was giving an account of his mission to Master Benjamin, and that the latter was reading Ramsay's letter, Sir James Darcus was reading to his daughter, from the official newspaper, the elevation of himself and Sir Alexander Edwards to the peerage under the titles of Baron Darcus and Baron Rosedale.

"Eh, Annie, what think you of that? You'll be the Baroness Rosedale one of these days, when my friend, Master Benjamin,—I beg his pardon, the Honourable Master Edwards,—succeeds to the title. How will you like that, child? Eh! I really think you are not a whit ambitious of the honour?" He had gained the object of his love, an earldom.

"I trust I'll fill the higher position properly, papa," answered Annie, quite demurely, "when I am once in it; but—oh, here is Sir Alexander—I mean Lord Rosedale—coming!" and running out to meet him, she exclaimed: "Welcome home with your new honours, my lord; let me be the first to congratulate you, and address you by your new title. Papa, dear," and she turned towards Lord Darcus as he approached from the house, and kissed him; "papa, dear, I am so glad of your elevation!"

The two new peers shook hands warmly as they met.

"Did I not tell you, my dear Darcus," exclaimed Lord Rosedale, "that I would succeed? I had no difficulty. I could have obtained a dozen creations at the same time, for His Majesty wishes to conciliate us as much as possible, fearing, he says, he may need our strongest assistance against those troublesome Irish before long."

"If His Majesty knew the Irish better, he'd like them better," interposed Annie; "'tis the way of the world to often believe stories as true that are only calumnies, without taking the pains to verify or falsify them, or conciliate the persons defamed."

"Why, my fiery politician," answered Lord Rosedale; "would you not rather offer us lunch than defame the judgment or penetration of our wise monarch?"

"Didn't you tell me not long since, my lord, that His Majesty King George, was insane, and now he is a 'wise monarch' with you? Would I put you two noble lords insane, I wonder, if I stayed to annoy you any further?" and making a low obeisance she ran into the house, followed more leisurely and stately by her father and Lord Rosedale. The latter paused on the steps, and putting his left hand on his companion's right shoulder, half whispered: "And now, Darcus, when may I hope to have your daughter mistress of Rosedale?"

"When you wish, Rosedale."

"What say you, then, to let us have the ceremony performed on to-morrow evening? Everything is prepared: I have brought some presents from London, which I will send over by Ben in the morning. We will have visitors calling to-morrow all day, and can retain as many as we wish for the ceremony; and I will ask Rector Snodgrass to come to the house here, and perform the knotting, so that we will have a quiet marriage." Sir James bowed, and they moved in. Annie had lunch already on the table, and as the servants quitted the apartment, her father addressed her:—"You know, Annie, that my friend here and I have long intended you to become the bride of his son and heir. We were waiting till our long-expected titles would be gained; and now that we have them, we see no necessity for delaying the marriage any longer. We think the ceremony may take place in the house here to-morrow evening, about—about—why, we may say seven o'clock."

"Yes, about seven will be a suitable time," assented Lord Rosedale; "and the rector will come to do the uniting business, Miss Darcus;—I may call you Annie now, may I not?" continued the rejoiced peer.

"You seem to have everything so beautifully arranged," returned Miss Darcus, quite gravely; "that it would be a shame to disturb the programme; so I shall try and make myself what a lord's daughter ought to be on such an occasion;" and she gracefully glided from the room as she thus agreeably acquiesced

in the proposed union, greatly to the delight, and no little to the surprise, of the peers. She immediately despatched a trust-worthy servant for Ned McCool, with the injunction not to return till her message, that she wished to see him in haste at Heather Hall, be delivered.

Ned, meantime, happened to call at Rosedale just as Percy was recovering from his attack. Master Benjamin was assisting the reviving soldier, but he directed Ned's attention to the bundle of papers lying on the table, uttering the single monosyllable, "Read." Ned read them over, carefully and attentively. When he finished the perusal, he stepped over to Master Benjamin, reached him his hand; and the two clasped in a long, warm, grasp. Ben knew he would never want a friend: Ned, that the other's heart was won to goodness and charity.

"His"—nodding to Percy, but speaking to Ned—"paper's burned. He"—speaking to Percy, but nodding to Ned—"knew of your life's story," said Master Benjamin; "do you think, Ned, could we procure his discharge from the army? His discharge might be procured from Colonel Warburton, I think—what say you?"

"Sure we can try anyhow," responded Ned; "you have great interest with the colonel. Oh, Master Benjamin, I forgot to tell you that Sir Alexander has returned."

"A messenger enquiring for Mr. McCool," announced a Rosedale servant at this moment.

"I'll run down and see," uttered Ned, hastily, skipping rapidly down into the hall; whence he returned in a few seconds to Master Benjamin.

"Miss Darcus has sent for me in a great hurry," he explained, as he returned; "I may take these papers of Ramsay with me, as I must see Hubert soon; but will see you again before I sleep. Percy, remain you here till my return; Master Benjamin will have no objection, I know, to your company for

a few hours." And Ned started away, off to Heather Hall, where he arrived in such good-time as to astonish the servant entering to inform Miss Darcus that "Mr. McCool would be here immediately."

Ned handed Ramsay's papers to Miss Darcus, who read them attentively, experiencing as many changes of feeling as Master Benjamin had done a few half hours previously, returning them to Ned when she had concluded.

Then she and Ned entered into a long conversation, which seemed intensely interesting to them. When it was concluded, and he going away, she extended her hand, as she smilingly said: "Shake hands, Ned; I never before could say 'good bye' to you as a lord's daughter. Remember we are always to be friends. Tell Hubert I am to call you Ned, and that you are to call me Annie. See me to-morrow some time early. Good night—Good night, Ned. Love to Mary."

Away Ned then started for Croghry Cave. It was now dark, at least sufficiently so for him not to fear being caught approaching it; and he was successful in gaining entrance unobserved. He found Hubert, Donaldson, and all the band, except those who acted as sentinels on the hill-side, keeping watch and guard.

"Welcome, Ned!—what news?" exclaimed Hubert, as he warmly shook hands with his foster-brother.

"Sad news, indeed," replied our hero, dolefully and with a look of sad calamity clouding his fine features; "you will be sorry to hear that Sir James Darcus and Sir Alexander Edwards are no more!"

"Sir James and Sir Alexander dead!" ejaculated Hubert and Donaldson in the same breath.

"Did I say they were dead?" queried Ned, a sly twinkling of his eye the only sign that he was joking.

"You said they were no more, and that surely means they are

dead," answered Donaldson, his voice wearing a slight tinge of vexation.

"And again I repeat it," iterated Ned; "*Sir James Darcus* and *Sir Alexander Edwards* are no more"—after a long pause, adding, "they have become *Lord Darcus* and *Lord Rosedale*—I have caught you both for once in your lives;" laughing explained Ned.

Permitting his auditors to express their astonishment at the unexpected elevation of the baronets, Ned handed Hubert and Donaldson the paper brought by Percy, only saying, "Read that," and then retired among the men to chat and laugh while their leader and his foster-brother were mastering the contents of Ramsay's letter. This done, Ned came forward, and, as he had done with Master Benjamin a short time before, he shook hands with Hubert, fervently, affectionately, brotherly.

"The new peers have arranged that Master Benjamin's marriage with Miss Darcus is to take place at Heather Hall at about seven o'clock to-morrow evening, and Rector Snodgrass is to be asked to perform the ceremony," Ned next informed his two friends; and then proceeded to explain to them the conversation he had just had with Miss Darcus,—“who is to call me Ned, and whom I am to call Annie,” he added,—and of the programme they had drawn up together.

"As I have much to do between now and to-morrow night, Hubert, I must be off;—but, Donaldson, how can I come here to-morrow, as come I must, with some clothes for Hubert?"

"As come you shan't," objected Donaldson; "there's nothing that's to be brought here, that mustn't either come to-night, or wait till to-morrow night. If you like, Jordan and I will go with you now, and bring back anything you wish; this will prevent any one coming here in daylight carrying bundles to-morrow. How does that suit, Master Ned?"

"It is most excellent, Master Donaldson," responded Ned,

good-humouredly; "so for the present good bye, Hubert; I'll not see you again, I suppose, till to-morrow night. Donaldson, will you and Jordan meet me in two hours exactly, at the cross-roads?"

Ned left the cave, and walked away rapidly, stopping not till he reached Mary Carlin's. With Mary he held a long and interesting conversation, accompanied throughout on Mary's part by many objections, and on Ned's by many arguments; the result being that Mary yielded to his requests and persuasive entreaties; so that, at his departure, they had settled their differences of opinion entirely, and she had come to fully understand and agree to what he proposed, whatever that was.

The negro began to think that he might, on this evening of Percy's return, pay a visit to Colonel Warburton; but did not until he first learned from Master Benjamin that the soldier had been both true and successful. So, somewhere about early bedtime, the African and his two masked companions descended to Castleporter cellars, where the colonel and his comrade soldiers were confined.

"Colonel," said the negro, when he had assisted the prisoners to a few drinks of brandy, "you have a soldier in your command who is named Joshua Percy; what reward would you take to write out his discharge from the army?"

"Why, you man or devil, were you not satisfied when you made me lose my thousands justly due me by that fool, Master Benjamin Edwards?"

"I was, then, Colonel; but since I heard of some of your young deeds that I didn't know of then, I feel that you haven't been punished enough yet, and feel it only fair that you should make any restitution to insulted human nature that it would be in your power to make."

"You have me in your power, and may dictate to me what terms your negroship pleases; but the day may ——"

"Take care, Colonel; remember the warning you got, that every threat adds four-and-twenty hours to your imprisonment—a thing I wouldn't trouble myself to mention only that I intend to relieve you some time on to-morrow evening, if you keep on your good behaviour till then; so take care, Colonel darling."

There was more bantering on both sides, but the result was, that Colonel Warburton wrote Joshua Percy's discharge; which, when the negro received and read it, was carried off forthwith to Rosedale, and delivered into the hands of Master Benjamin, who, in turn, immediately presented it to the astonished soldier, to the great delight of the negro, who had, himself, carried Percy's discharge to Rosedale, where he found Percy and Master Benjamin sitting just as Ned McCool had left them lately before.

The negro retired, and the joyful Percy prepared to depart for the barracks, to get his trunks and some other articles from thence, and return again to Rosedale, where Master Benjamin promised him food and lodging for a few days.

Let it not be imagined that, because Percy's dealings and conversation with Master Benjamin have been, and will be, so hurriedly and, therefore, shortly glanced at, the poor soldier was ungrateful or did not return thanks to the restorer of his liberty, the saviour of his life. Far from it; his thanks and gratitude welled up in every word he uttered, in every glance that beamed from his eyes, in every gesture he made. His heart was too full for him to give even an approximate expression to his feelings. He was free—free! free! How he kept muttering and murmuring and breathing forth that ineffably sweet monosyllable, "FREE!" He was free—that satisfied him; he was no longer bound, no longer afraid of threats—that effected so complete, so wonderful a transformation in him, that Master Benjamin was amply compensated by the improvement, amply thanked by the friendship the soldier vowed to him; friendship, he felt, that would exist while Percy lived, and would end only with death, that terminates all things of this world of ours.

The negro, in obtaining the necessary papers from Colonel

Warburton relative to Percy's discharge, took care to have them dated at a time when the colonel was in command; so that when the soldier presented himself in the civilian clothes, and showed his discharge, he was allowed to pass unquestioned from the army,—he was no longer one of His Majesty's soldiers,—no longer subject to floggings, nor browbeatings,—no longer afraid to walk upright and manly.

The Clinker had chanced to notice his messenger when entering the gate, and was anxiously waiting till he would arrive. When Percy, therefore, reached his employer's room, he was met by a most outrageous burst of anathema.

"By ——, I have a strong mind to go and report you at once at head quarters; why did you dare to keep me waiting your pleasure to hear your news? Percy, by the great ——, if you ever treat me in such a way again, I'll not let all the promises you can swear to, sway me off. To see a villain that I can hang treat me in such a way. Perhaps you'll condescend to tell me your news,—try, will you?"

"I think, Huxtle, I'll not give you any information till you learn to conduct yourself as you should to a gentleman."

The calm, determined coolness with which Percy uttered these words, would, of itself, have proved his birth, have proved that his education and association were once far superior to the vulgar herd surrounding him or the unwieldy brute before him.

"Conduct—myself—to—a—gentleman,—and—from—you—From you! You, whose life I hold in my hands! You, whose neck I could get the cord round any minute I wanted to! Do I contain myself and hear this! Am I stupid or not? Who dares to say this to me?"

The Clinker became so frightfully excited, that he not only lost power of utterance, but even forgot to express a single oath during the delivery of his rhapsody. For some minutes his mental derangement continued, and, before he collected himself or cooled down, Percy was moving towards the door.

"Stay, Percy," uttered the Clinker, with frightful calmness; "stay a little, and let us have a chat over matters."

"I'll stay, Huxley," firmly and boldly replied Percy, "till I explain some matters. I brought a paper from your comrade Ramsay, and what he said when he gave it to me was, 'That tells comrade Huxley all I know; tell him to be careful, and he'll get thousands?' That's all I know of the meaning of the paper. But whatever its meaning was, it is in the hands of Master Benjamin Edwards and Ned M'Cool, for to them I gave it on my return this evening from Lincoln. Eh, Huxley, wasn't that daring on my side? Wasn't that retaliation for all that you've made me endure these years past, you brutal tyrant! Are you punished, now, Huxley? You, a mean scum, daring to trample on me, who was a gentleman by position, though your equal—no, by Heaven, I never could be that—in misconduct! Have I not retaliated? Has the dog you alternately kicked and patted, not bitten at length! And so will it be to the end of the world; the man who acts the tyrant may find the weakest of his victims returning retribution in a hundred-fold degree! Be warned, Huxley! The blow Ned M'Cool dealt you should have taught you a lesson; let this avenging of mine still more teach you! For me, I defy you; do your worst—your best is bad;" and leaving the Clinker overpowered by the resistless pathos with which Percy denounced and defied him, only hoping that he may become a better member of society in future, for our business with him, for the present, is ended; the erewhile soldier sought Rosedale, where, after a good supper, and in a good bed, he slept the first sleep of real peacefulness he had experienced since that fatal evening so many years ago, when his hands became imbued for the first and last time in the blood of a fellow-creature; and as he sank into repose the words of petition lingered on his lips; "Mercy, Lord, mercy."

It may be remembered that the negro withdrew from Rosedale after giving Master Benjamin the colonel's discharge for Joshua Percy. He travelled very rapidly to Moneyfin, entered an apothecary's shop, and demanded sixpence worth of laudanum

for his "massa, Cuhnel Wabhuhtin." The apothecary had no hesitation in supplying the required article; the negro paid the sixpence, walked out, and trotted rapidly away in the direction of Castleporter.

For the rest of the night, dear reader, will you and I rest ourselves, that we may be fresh for the morrow's important performance? Good night, then; and a sound sleep.

CHAPTER XXII., AND LAST.

It was almost the first time in his life for Sir James—Baron Darcus—to permit himself to be drawn into an act of condescension; and as such he certainly considered it, when he yielded so far to his daughter's solicitations, as to issue invitations to the tenantry on the Darcus estate to spend a day at Heather Hall, in honour of their landlord's elevation to the peerage, and to celebrate in a suitable manner his daughter's marriage with the Honourable Master Edwards. And though it was no condescension on his part, when he thought it so, it gratified him equally as much, he deigned also to invite all the surrounding gentry, many of whom had never entered Heather Hall before, and all of whom wondered at the unexpected invitation, to dine with him that evening; and this latter portion of his guests he purposed to be present at the marriage ceremony. But the greatest humiliatory act to which Lord Darcus assented was yielding to Annie's wish that Mary Carlin should be one of her bridesmaids.

"What! Mary Carlin! A poor ignorant country girl bridesmaid to a peer's daughter! No such thing, Annie! no such thing! I am shocked at your making such a request!"

"But papa dear, you have never seen her! And I have; and I know she is neither ignorant nor rustic, papa. She has more of nature's politeness than many a lordly dame, whose company I would shun, papa, and I now court Mary Carlin's."

"Well, well, child, have your own way," poutingly replied his lordship; "but if I am provoked at her mawkish manners and forget myself to insult her or make a burst, you mustn't blame me, for you knew, child, I cannot always command myself."

"You will see, papa, you will like her. I am so happy that you have consented to let me have her. Thank you, papa."

About twelve o'clock the lawn and demesne began to be filled; not, however, by the tenants alone; for hundreds of stragglers from Moneyfin, and even from Clonleek and the surrounding districts, gathered up too—the news of the general invitation having spread far and fast. And then about two, the stewards and the servants began to spread the good things on the tables already placed on the lawn; and the crowds sat down, and the larders and cellars of Heather Hall were well emptied of many a barrel of ale, and many a keg of whiskey, and many a bottle of wine, and many a burden of mutton and bacon and beef, before the congregated multitude grew repleted of the viands so abundantly and so temptingly set before them. And when Lord Darcus appeared with his beautiful daughter there arose such a cheer from the crowds, as never before resounded through the atmosphere of Moneyfin. And cheer followed cheer, to the health of the newly created peer, and the "handsome Lady Annie," as the tenantry named her. And then the fiddlers began to play,—for the Irish are proverbially a nation of musicians, and the localities are few indeed but can boast of its local Paganini's,—and the young men and maidens began to trip it to the stirring strains of an Irish jig; and again rose loud and high the thrilling cheer when the favourite Ned McCool led out the blushing and handsome Miss Darcus to toe it to an Irish horn-pipe.

And then the jolly, good-humoured, brawny, herculean blacksmith, Brian Malone, with his rolling, stentorian tones, shouted for silence, and called on them all to fill for a toast—for the drink was there in abundance—and gave:—"Here's to Miss Darcus and Ned McCool—the peeress and the peasant; may the one never dislike the other; but may the high ones love and guard the people, and may the people respect and support the gentry!"

"And intertwined with such amiable reciprocity may the corona of the aristocracy be wreathed and intermingled with the

shamrock of nationality; both mutually consolidating and invigorating the beauteousness and fecundity of our unequalled island home—our own fair and glorious Erin;" interjected Mr. Austin Bresland, our friend the pedagogue; who chuckled as he enjoyed the opportunity offered for displaying his powers of language and oratory before so numerous an assembly.

Next appeared Master Benjamin Edwards and Mary Carlin; and the echoing cheering again uprose; while Lord Darcus approached his daughter and whispered:—"Who is that lady, Annie, Edwards has?"

"That is a secret, papa; I mustn't tell you her name till the rector comes," replied Annie. But she pressed Ned's arm as she spoke; and had her parent been observant of Ned at the moment, instead of gazing on the passing incidents before him and communing with himself on his greatness and importance, he would easily have noticed the blush of joy and happiness which suffused our hero's countenance when Mary was so courteously referred to by his lordship.

And then his lordship made a speech, which seemed to conciliate his tenants for life; for again the bursts of cheering rose, and wavered, and rose again, and commingled with the waving of the leaves and branches of the demesne trees, that seemed to nod, and bow, and courtesy in graceful accompaniment with the effusions of happiness and mirth below.

And then the more respectable of the guests began to arrive; and once more in energetic union the thundering acclaims uprose when Rector Snodgrass and Father Boyce, the parish priest of the parish, walked up the avenue arm-in-arm, and together tendered their congratulations to Lord Darcus.

"Yes, brethren and friends," exclaimed Mr. Bresland; "see there; behold that approaching example worthy to be extolled in loftiest hexameters by a Virgil or a Homer;—thus should it ever be, different in particulars, but united in patriotism; alike professors of Christianity they show themselves true and excellent

followers of their Great Example; and announce to this sublunary creation that they are actuated by the transcendently sublime inspirations of those supernaturally celestial virtues, friendship and love,—virtues we should ever endeavour to obtain, and never refuse to cultivate.”

High and higher ascended the piercing acclamations at this outburst of the pedantic old pedagogue.

Lord Rosedale soon after drove up; and the tenantry and other crowds began to disperse, as night was approaching. And darkness began to set in; and Annie Darcus retired to don her wedding dress, attended by Mary Carlin. And Ned McCool, meantime, disappeared, and could not be found by the many messengers despatched by Lord Darcus to find him.

Seven o'clock arrived.

In the large, magnificently furnished and magnificently lighted drawing-room of Heather Hall, specially and gorgeously though hastily decorated for the important occasion, stood Rector Snodgrass, arrayed in his officiating robes to perform the ceremony, and by his side stood Father Boyce; while around the room stood the invited guests, and over all floated the savoury aroma from the dining-room where a sumptuous *dejeuner* was being laid.

Lord Darcus immediately entered, the bride on one arm, and on the other Mary Carlin, whom, when he heard her name he apologised to, for having opposed his daughter's wish to have her as bridesmaid. Such unusual condescension on his Lordship's part is equal to pages of description praising her and depicting her fresh and virtuous beauty.

Lord Rosedale and Master Benjamin now stood forward; the rector opened his book, made a few remarks appropriate to the occasion, and the marriage ceremony began.

But an unexpected and startling event then occurred.

The athletic negro, who has been so prominent and important

an actor in this life drama, entered the apartment, and, notwithstanding the opposition offered by those of the guests who were in his way, he succeeded in gaining a position by the side of the rector, who paused in sheer amazement at the apparition. Not allowing time for any one to hinder him, the negro addressed Lord Darcus, this time using no negro phraseology.

"For the second time, my lord, I stand in your presence to warn you to be cautious. Is there no doubt remaining on your mind regarding the matter I warned you of before?"

"For the second time, you unmannerly villain, you have intruded yourself impertinently upon me," exclaimed his lordship, in reply; leave my house instantly, or my servants shall kick you out."

"Let them try it. You are a magistrate, my lord; so are you, my Lord Rosedale; but, since you are both interested parties in the mystery about to be explained, your opinions might be considered as partial. To you, therefore, Mr. Snodgrass, I appeal, as being disinterested. I wish you to read this paper aloud, and then decide on its truth or the opposite. And first, would your reverence please explain what there was wanting in Widow Mason's manuscript?"

"I'll inform the company on that point myself," interrupted Lord Rosedale; "though why you are suffered to annoy us is to me totally incomprehensible." His lordship gave an outline of the investigation about Master Benjamin's birth, glancing cursorily at Widow Mason's antebibliography, and continued:—"The only person mentioned in the old woman's paper as likely to be my rightful heir was Mr. Santley—Mr. Hubert Santley. Now, Mr. Santley's mother averred that he was really *her* son, and could not, therefore, be *mine*; and she was certain of this from the raspberry mark on his neck, which she even showed to Mrs. Mason. No other person than Mr. Santley was mentioned by any one; his own mother proves that he can't be my heir; consequently, my son Benjamin, here present, is my son and heir."

His lordship looked around with an assured air, believing his argument incontrovertible, but was a little astonished when the negro next questioned him.

"But were you not told that Oliver Huxtley, Colonel Warburton's servant, could tell you something of the mystery,—did you apply to him, my lord?"

"We applied to him, but the fight had left him senseless, and he could give us no information. Why annoy us any further?"

"You see where this mysterious affair needs explanation, rector; will you please read this paper now, and see what it contains?"

And the negro drew back against the wall, where he stood, arms folded, lips muttering, eyes rolling, while his reverence opened the paper, cleared his throat, and began to read, having first begged the company to be seated, as the paper seemed pretty lengthy.

"Lincoln, Monday.

"Comrade Huxtley,

Your messenger got here yesterday, and handed me the letter you sent. Ah wonder bud you sent me moare information oah what you wanted. Bud, you want, ah think, ta leearn all aboot the fellur ma wife swapped, 'at ah wur tellin' you aboot." ("I shall not delay, giving you all the idioms of the English eastern counties," the rector here paused to say to his audience; "but shall translate into our more respectable language, which will be more easily understood.") "Well, now comrade"—the reader turned to the letter again—"look you, my wife is dead, and I wouldn't care to interfere now by any means, only that I wish to help an old comrade along, and to get a small trifle myself, for I am growing old now, and am far from as strong or as healthy as when my Esther, that's my wife's name, was nursing in Moneyfin twenty or thirty years ago. But about the swopping of the children;—that's what you wrote about by your messenger, comrade, was it not? Esther

and me never had any children, but she had a sister living with her husband in the same regiment with us in England; and when I was ordered to Ireland, we left this sister of Esther's behind us in England. Well, sometime after we got to Moneyfin, my wife's sister wrote to Esther, and told us that her husband was dead, and that she was dying of a cancer in her side, and that their baby, a little boy of a few weeks old, had no one to nurse him, and would Esther not go over and see her before she died, and take charge of the little infant? So Esther went to see her sister, and she stayed with her till she died, and till she saw her buried, and when she came back to me she had the little baby with her, and it was a fine healthy child, and I was right fond of it in a few days. Well, then, comrade, Esther got a child to nurse that had the duckiest mark of a raspberry on it that ever you saw in your life, just right on the back of the neck. And my wife says to me one day: 'Zed,' says she; 'wouldn't that be a nice sure mark to know this child by again if ever it was lost?' And I said it would. And she says; 'Zed, if that child was a rich man's son I'd steal it away or swop it, and then when it would be grown up, wouldn't we get lots of money for producing the rightful heir?' 'That we would, Esther,' said I. 'Zed,' says my wife to me another day; 'I know where there's a baronet's son out at nurse, and it's a right sickly thing, and I think I'll swop this one of my sister's for it if I can; and we'll give the other one then, instead of this little thing with the raspberry mark on its neck; and then we'll have a secret that'll bring us thousands some day.' 'But, wife,' says I; 'you can't swop this child with its neck marked, for its mother would miss it, and know its not her own.' 'Zed,' says she, 'you're only a child yourself. Couldn't we,' says she, 'put another mark of the same sort on the baronet's child, for I know what'll do it, and then the mother wouldn't know the difference?' 'That we can, Esther,' says I; 'for look at the marks that soldiers and sailors always have on them.' Well, comrade, it was the very next day that Esther came in with the baronet's sickly child with her, and she showed me a lot of pound notes she had got besides; and she had given her sister's healthy child for this

weakly thing. And then she fell to and impressed with a pin and a liquid she bought at an apothecary's shop the mark of a raspberry on the new child; and the two children got so like that a stranger couldn't tell the difference between them. And in less than a week the baronet's child grew as plump and well as the other one Esther was nursing. But this one's mother came for it, and Esther gave it to her as her own, but it was the baronet's she gave instead of that, and when the mother got it, she looked at it to see if it had the mark on its neck, and it had, and when she saw that, she was satisfied, although Esther and me were trembling for fear she would notice the swap, but she went away, taking the baronet's child with her for her own, though she didn't know that, and we kept her child with us. And this is true, comrade, true as that I am Zedekiah Ramsay, true as that there's a heaven for the good and a hell for the bad, true as anything, true as that the sun shines in summer, true, so help me Heaven. Soon after this I applied for a change, and got away to Dublin, but someway things didn't go well with me and Esther, for the little child that we held died, and Esther took ill of a fever, and lay on her bed for months before she got well again, and then I took ill, and was lying for months too; and the only consolation Esther had was to visit the grave of the little thing that died with us. And then we were afraid of being found out, for the nurse that swopped the child with Esther got conscience-stricken, and came and asked us and begged us to tell her what we did with the baronet's baby, but we were thinking too much of the money we'd get some day for our secret, to tell her; and all we would say was for her to go and find out where Esther was nursing at the time, for we knew this couldn't help her much. And now, comrade Huxley, some people may say that this story is only a made-up thing, but I swear it is the truth, and I'll go to a magistrate and swear to it before I send it to you by your messenger, and then nobody can doubt of it. And if, after all that, anyone still doubts, tell them that Esther's sister's child has a little lump, like a little wart, on his left foot, in the inside, just below the ankle, and another on the left arm below the elbow, but on the outside. And these are true marks.

So far I have given you no names, comrade, but I'll give them all to you now, and you may rest certain that they are the right ones. I'll begin with the baronet whose child we stole; his name and residence was Sir Alexander Edwards of Rosedale, and it was him that got Esther's sister's child instead of his own sick one that his nurse,—she was called Mrs. Widow Mason, comrade,—swopped with my wife; and the woman, that it was her child had the raspberry mark on its neck that died with us in Dublin and lies buried there, that woman was Mrs. Santley, and she lived on the Darcus property, not far from Sir James Darcus's residence of Heather Hall. The nurse that was nursing Sir Alexander's son lived in a lonely little cottage in the glen below Heather Hall. So, comrade Huxley, here is the way things are now. The young man who will grow up as young Mr. Santley, will be really Sir Alexander Edwards's son and heir of Rosedale; and the young gentleman who will grow up as Sir Alexander's son and heir will be my Esther's sister's only son. Mrs. Santley's real son I have already told you died with us in Dublin. Here is the whole secret then. Try and make what you can out of it. Screw plenty from them all. I'll only ask half of what you get, and I know you daren't refuse me that, for the oath you took when I told you of this first binds you still. Be watchful, and write soon, and tell me how the secret is working. Your comrade,

ZEDEKIAH RAMSAY."

"This concludes this most extraordinary piece of news, ladies and gentlemen," said the rector, at this stage; "and extraordinary it really is, yet—stay—here is a postscript I missed. It is in a different and better handwriting—ha! it is the magistrate's affirmation. Here it is:—"

"I certify that Zedekiah Ramsay has taken an affidavit before me this 27th day of October, eighteen hundred and —, to the effect that he is the writer of the above manuscript, and that all he has there written is strictly true.

(Signed,)

THEOBALD LUSHINGTON, J.P.,

Lincoln, 27th Oct., 18——."

"This is surely the conclusion of this strange story," added the rector.

"I deny the entire fabrication, and denounce the whole concoction as a calumnious falsehood," exclaimed Lord Rosedale.

"You need not, my lord," interposed Master Benjamin; "I have read those papers, and have taken pains to investigate the assertions they contain. Though with reluctance, I am compelled to admit that they are true. I have the wart-marks on my foot and arm, and I now cheerfully resign to Hubert Santley my hitherto usurped position of being your son and heir; while I, though I can never think of you but as a father and a kind one, must cease to call you such. My life henceforth will be spent far from here;—I have already made my arrangements to leave Ireland;—nay, father,—my lord,—let me live in ignorance of what you would say, for I shall ever believe you would never withhold from me a son's support, and nothing you can urge will change my resolution. Miss Darcus, though we may never meet again after to-night, I shall bear with me through life thy features indelibly impressed on my mind, and shall look upon my interviews with you as the golden spots in my memory's retrospections. Ladies and gentlemen all, if in my past conduct anything has been offensive, I beg you to pardon me for it, and when thinking of the far-off wanderer, say something soft of him if you can, and if you cannot, deal as lightly with his faults as you can;" and the speaker withdrew to a position near the door.

A general consternation, silence, and amazement sat on every countenance at this farewell; no one seemed to know the sequel; no one seemed inclined to disturb the uneasy calm; the negro broke the anxious silence.

"Hubert Santley, now the Right Honourable Master Edwards, stand forward!"

A slight disturbance now occurred near the door, and Hubert, handsome and brave looking, walked forward. He shook hands with Master Benjamin,—him who was that,—at the door as he

passed up, then bowed to my Lords Darcus and Rosedale, shook hands with Annie and Mary, and took up a position nearly face to face with Lord Rosedale, though at about two yards distance from him.

The negro then spoke again.

"My Lord Rosedale, look at that man standing before you; look well at his features; look closely"—the speaker paused; then proceeded: "Have you done so, my lord? Thoroughly? Then cast back your memory to the first day you saw Miss Ellen O'Ronan as she stood over your reviving figure, when hers was the first face you saw as you recovered from your fall, thrown down by your horse;—think of her features on that important day, my lord;—think of them again on that other important day when she stood a blushing bride by your side; bring her in fondest imagination before you, my lord, and compare that man's features with her's; and the husband and parent must be far back in you indeed, if your heart does not discern the resemblance, and compel you to cry out, in truth, that he is your son."

"He is my son; I acknowledge the resemblance! He does, indeed, bear the features of my beloved Ellen! My son truly and really!" ejaculated Lord Rosedale, actually throwing himself on Hubert's neck, and weeping softly and gladly; "I never could believe," he whispered low in Hubert's ear, "that that other was my darling, brave Ellen's son."

The negro permitted a few minutes to elapse to allow Lord Rosedale's feelings to find vent, and then continued.

"All this, my lords, ladies and gentlemen, seems very strange; and what may seem strangest of all is the strangeness of an African taking such a leading part in the mystery. It has all occurred by a mere chance. By chance, a piece of paper came into my hands, and that gave me the first clue to the business; I told Lord Darcus—then Sir James—of it;—you remember my visit, my lord, and how you threatened to get me kicked out of Heather Hall?"—"I remember," muttered Lord Darcus;

"Hubert Sandley also heard of it, but he only laughed at it; the story of widow Mason——,"

"Who are you? How do you know everything so well?" here interrupted Lord Darcus; the question was repeated by Rector Snodgrass and Lord Rosedale; but the negro only waved his ebony hand as if to imply that he would inform them who he was immediately; and continued:—

"The manuscript of widow Mason helped the mystery a little out of its mysteriousness; Colonel Warburton——"

"Who speaks of Colonel Warburton?" interrupted that individual himself; but seeing the negro, he drew a pistol, and though a hand was stretched time enough to save darkey, the ball flew and struck the ceiling, falling harmlessly on the floor; ere it fell, two men in masks pinioned the daring officer against the wall, while the erstwhile Master Benjamin stood before him, with a pistol held threateningly towards his breast, and the negro proceeded:—

"Colonel Warburton could have made his giant servant tell much if he had chosen!"—"It's a —— lie," interrupted the colonel—"but he would not, expecting, with the Clinker, to squeeze money from the two interested young men; so he plotted, and got Hubert there taken prisoner, intending to hold him in bondage till a false, deceitful, unjust, treacherous debt would be paid. Thanks be to God, right has been done; Mrs. Mason's wrong has been righted; her spirit may rest in peace now; for her error has been made right. Rector, proceed with the marriage ceremony."

"Not, in any case, till we know who you are," exclaimed Lord Darcus, impatiently and determinedly; "I am not to be dictated to in my own house by a negro—one whom no one knows! How can you speak our language so well?"

"I have been reared in Ireland, my lord," replied the negro; "and 'tis therefore no wonder my accent has nothing African about it; my parents were reared in Ireland, too, my lord,

another reason why my accent sounds Irish; de fac am, massa," and the speaker's voice rolled in the real nigger phrase; "dat am all, blood, bones, flesh, mahhow, haah, all ober, Irish, an de Great Spirit be braised foh de blessin."

As the speaker concluded in his negro idiom, he threw off, just where he stood, a pair of big top-boots, a large, too large overcoat, a pair of ebon-coloured gloves, an ebon-coloured mask with its covering of curly woolly hair and its thick nigger lips, and stood before the amazed gathering, the laughing, hearty, frolicking, good-humoured, and athletic—NED McCOOL!

"Hell and furies!" wildly exclaimed Colonel Warburton, "and is it by you that I have been fooled so often!"

"Yes, colonel; by me and the two men now holding you, generally. How you hid the pistol you have now used, I don't know. A few words of explanation are due from me now, company all," said our hero, "regarding my part in these transactions. I am unable to explain why such a thing takes place, but this much is certain;—nothing of importance has ever occurred to me or my immediate friends, that I have not previously felt myself irresistibly compelled to follow a particular course, even before knowing anything of the coming event. That gentleman"—pointing to the colonel—"had been in the habit of annoying a particular lady friend of mine," indicating Mary Carlin, where she sat beside Annie Darcus; "I knew nothing of it till told by a comrade of mine, the first night of the wake at Castleporter. As quick as thought I felt impelled to prove to the colonel that Miss Carlin had friends; my two masked friends there and I carried out the plot and punished the colonel and his servant. To avenge themselves on the 'black devil,' as they called me, they issued the challenge on the fair day. The result is known. It was on the night that the colonel and his servant were punished that the paper, from which I first got an inkling of this mystery, dropped from the Clinker's pocket; here again came on me the impulse to follow up the hint thus found. I did so, and the result is now seen. Pardon me for occupying you so long."

"But why not act in your own proper person?" asked Lord Darcus.

"And expose myself to be seized any time the colonel might think fit!" replied Ned; who continued: "Rector, you may proceed with the ceremony, I think."

In a few seconds Annie Darcus repeated the words that bound her to Hubert for life; her hand was given where her affections had long since been bestowed.

"But one thing now remains undone," said Hubert;—"I hate, do you not also, dear reader? to change his name, now that our journey together is so nearly accomplished, so we will even call him Hubert to the end;—" Father Boyce, your services are now needed on a disease similar to mine. My foster-brother is anxious that you should prevent him from fighting any more challenges on behalf of Miss Carlin; and as he can't part from her, he wishes you to unite them on this night of re-unions."

"Yes, Father Boyce, do so," added Lord Darcus; "for the time, my house will be your officiating temple."

"I was always willing to make people happy," responded the priest, good-humouredly; "so come forward, and in the Name of God, I'll tie the knot;—more especially," he added in a low voice, "as I know you're both fit for it, and I'm prepared."

So Ned McCool and Mary Carlin were made man and wife. "The handsomest couple I ever married—and as good as they are handsome," whispered Father Boyce to the rector when he performed the ceremony.

General congratulations now occurred. Among the rest, Henry Donaldson wished health, long life, and happiness to the young couples.

"Come, Donaldson," pleaded Hubert; "on this eventful night, let me beg of you to drop your way of life. Come and reside near Rosedale, and while I live you'll never want a friend."

"No, Santley—Edwards—for I'll use no title," he replied; "many thanks for your offer. I can't accept it. That demon there"—pointing to Warburton—"made me what I am; and on his shoulders rest the sins of my life. Don't, Ned"—as he saw our hero about to entreat too;—"don't; 'tis useless. He"—Warburton—"is the only man I will pursue to punishment; so let him beware. Good bye, Santley—Santley to me, ever;—Good bye, Ned;—ladies you won't refuse the hand of a friend though a robber; good bye, my lords, I shall never annoy you again."

Nor did he. In a few months afterwards his life was ended on the fatal gibbet—he was hung in Londonderry.

Master Benjamin now said his farewells.

"Henceforth, Santley,—I'll call you Santley yet,—I'll be a nameless wanderer over the face of the earth. But though a 'NAMELESS ONE,' I shant be alone. Percy is to accompany me. If we live long and be successful, you shall hear from us; otherwise you never may. Good bye. Good bye, father, for you were always that to me. Good bye, my Lord Darcus. Good bye, company all. Good bye, Ned. Good bye, Mary; pardon me for my misconduct to you. Good bye, Annis," and the poor fellow's eyes filled as he addressed his loved one, whom he had left last; he held her hand, and repeated, "Good bye, Annie; I may call you that now. Think of the 'NAMELESS ONE' wandering afar from here."

He departed. As he passed the colonel beside the door, the latter threatened; "Go, but remember I am after you for my vengeance to the uttermost lands of the earth. Think not to escape me, for I swear to pursue you to a living death!"

"I accept the challenge, and defy you," daringly responded the Nameless One. He departed; nor was he, until he became an old, old man, again seen in the neighbourhood of his boyish home.

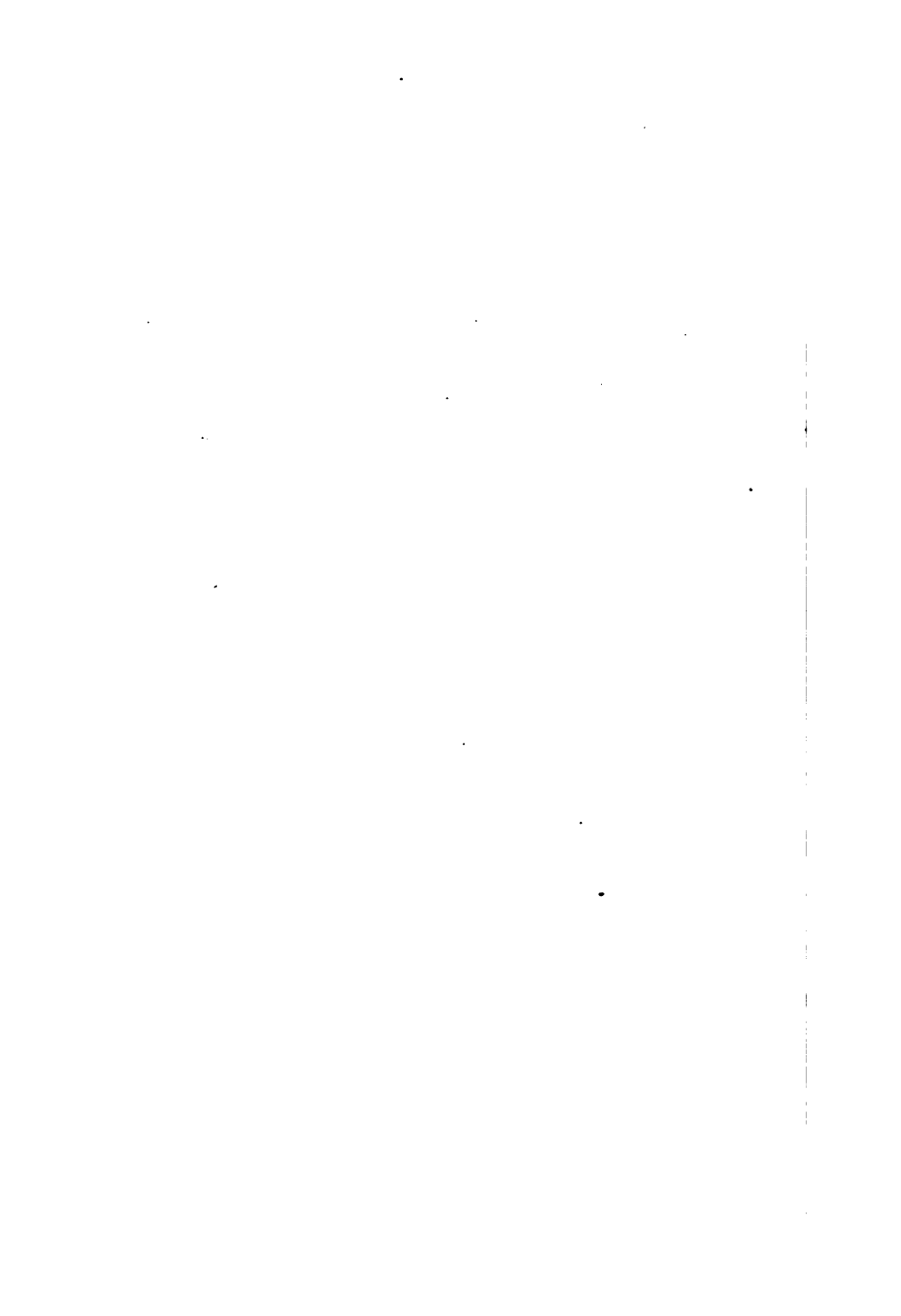
At a nod from Ned the two men in masks led the colonel to the outside. He had been brought, while under the effects of a dose of laudanum, to one of the cellars of Heather Hall, Annie knowing of the circumstance. Then he had been brought forward in time to be exposed by the negro, alias Ned. And now he disappeared. It was found afterwards that he hastened to the barracks, packed up as quickly as possible, and in company with Huxley rode swiftly away from Moneyfin.

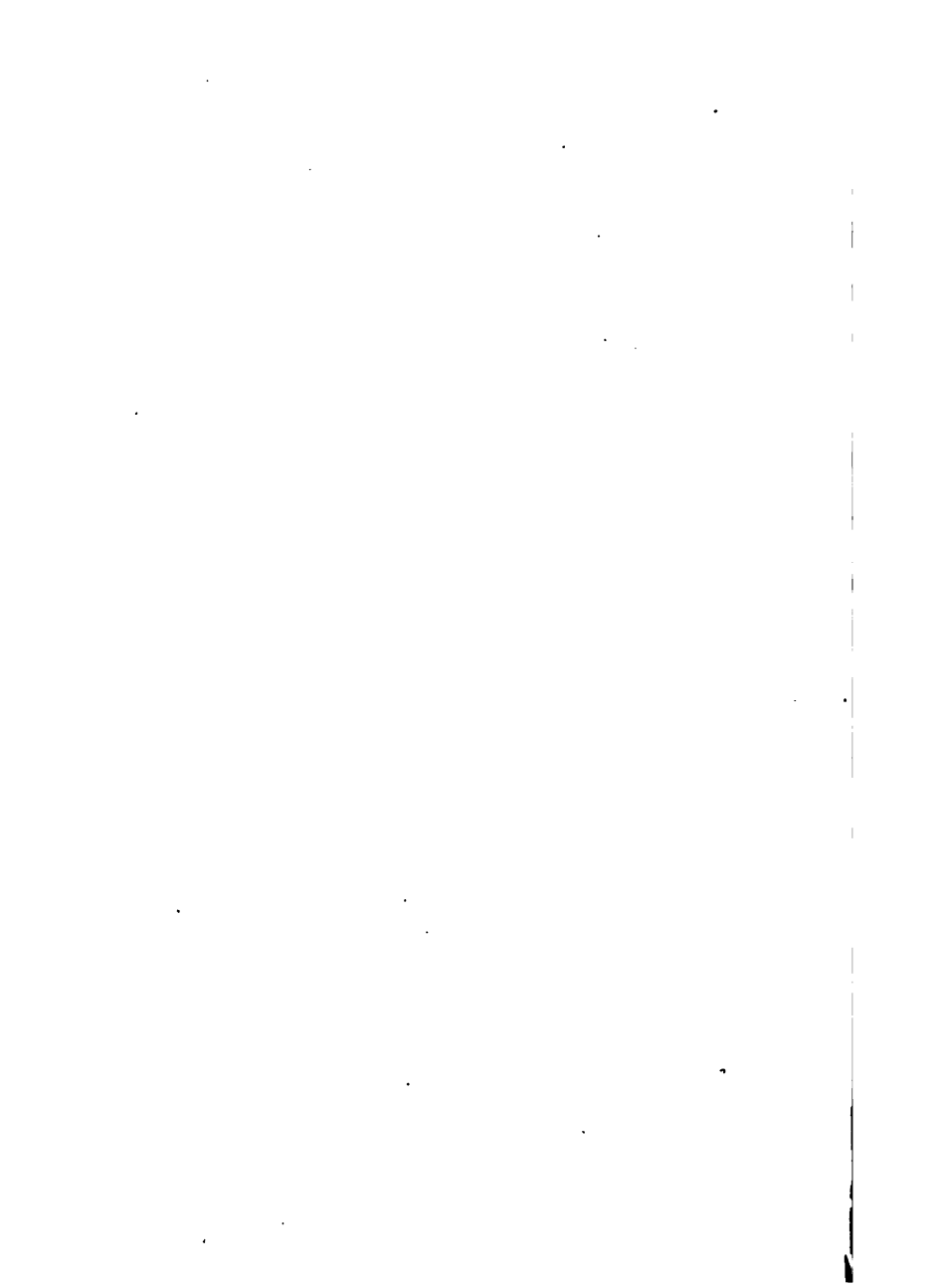
"Father Boyce, your duty and mine, as clergymen," began the rector, when the colonel was led away, "are ended for to-night. Before, as guests of Lord Darcus, we adjourn to partake of the good things waiting for us in another apartment, we have, I think, reason to express ourselves as grateful to Providence for having freed us from such a man as Colonel Warburton. To the bridegrooms, I shall only express my hope, and it is my conviction too, that they will use every endeavour to make our Irish people contented, prosperous, and peaceful. There is no surer way of accomplishing this than by preventing poverty, and promoting education. Do you then, gentlemen, in all your spheres, try to increase the comforts of the peasantry; and Father Boyce and I shall do the same in ours. We have just seen a good example of the miseries and punishments evil brings on her votaries; let us ever, then, shun her, and so finally steer securely to the haven of everlasting enjoyment, the real home, as it ought to be the only real goal, of all."

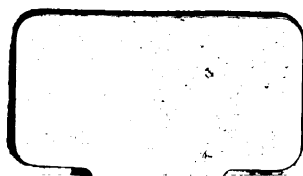
Amen, Rector Snodgrass—Amen—Amen—Amen.

Let Love rule all, and Love will win all.

THE END.







ENTERED AT STATIONER'S HALL.



NED MCCOY
AND HIS
FOSTER BROTHER